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CRYING FOR VENGEANCE.

A Novel.

BY
ELLEN C. CLAYTON,

AUTHOR OF "QUEENS OF SONG," "ENGLISH FEMALE ARTISTS,"
"PLAYING FOR LOVE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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CRYING FOR VENGEANCE.



CHAPTER I.

GUSTAVE'S LETTER.

A WEEK passed, and Tom Wynstyn had not yet spoken to his wife on the terrible subject. On the morning of the eighth day, Lucille ran into his room with an open paper in her hand.

"See," she exclaimed, holding it towards him, "I have this instant received a telegram, telling me of an accident which has happened to my grandmother. She is in the hands of a doctor at Sèvres."

"What has befallen her?" asked Lucille's husband.

"Read the telegram. She slipped down and injured her ankle in some way. I must go to

her at once. I cannot leave her to the mercy of servants."

"How the deuce did she get to Sèvres? I thought she was in Paris?"

"I don't know. The telegram is very brief, as you see. We ought to go to her—don't you think so, my dearest love?"

"What an intolerable bore! Nice cheerful occupation, nursing an invalided old woman! You may go if you like, but I shall not."

"I could not go without you," said Lucille, hurt by his manner.

"Why not?"

"People would think it so strange—and, besides——"

"Well, you must only choose between not going and braving what people may think. I shall not go. You need not go alone—the Gardners, to whom you have taken such a fancy, are going to Paris in a day or two, and you might go with them."

"There would be no necessity for you to even see my grandmamma," urged Lucille.

"You might remain in Paris, and I could go to her."

But his resolution was not to be shaken. A

couple of days passed, during which Lucille exerted all her influence to induce him to accompany her, and he finally consented. He insisted, however, that the household should be left just as it was, and desired that they should return as soon as was possible. He declined having any active share in any of the arrangements, so Lucille was obliged to write to the physician who had sent the telegram, and she also wrote a long letter to the marquise, in which she assured her that they would be with her immediately.

Tom Wynstyn's ill humour visibly increased according as the hours intervening between the despatch of these letters, and the day appointed for their departure passed away. Lucille bore with him, without evidencing any resentment, but she felt wounded by his conduct. When they reached Paris, Tom refused to visit Madame de Rochequillon. Lucille was therefore obliged to go alone to Sèvres.

Lucille lost no time in despatching a message to the physician who attended her grandmother, informing him of her arrival, and of the day when she intended going to the house. The next morning she set off,

very early. She felt greatly reassured on seeing the kind face of the old woman who opened the door. The whole place looked clean and comfortable, and she thought she had never seen a more homelike spot. At the desire of the old dame, she went into the little sitting-room, to wait until the nurse, who was above, should answer the summons. The old woman seemed such a good creature, and was so unaffected and motherly, that Lucille found herself talking freely. In a few minutes the nurse came down—a tall, ugly woman, the plainness of whose visage was almost redeemed by its kindly, sorrowful expression.

Madame de Rochequillon was asleep, and it would not be well to arouse her. The nurse was rather glad of this, she admitted, because the doctor had left strict injunctions that she was not to be agitated in any way, and she would be very much pleased if madam would wait until he came, as the responsibility would then be lifted off her shoulders. His usual time was one o'clock, and it was now half-past twelve, so she would not have long to wait. Lucille anxiously inquired if there was any danger of fever.

The doctor had declared that there was great danger if the patient were agitated in any way.

Almost as the nurse spoke, the physician entered. Lucille's few formal words of introduction were scarcely needed to assure him of what he guessed on seeing her, that she was the lady who had written to him, the granddaughter of his patient.

He was so polite, so kind and considerate in his manner, that in five minutes Lucille was talking to him with as much ease as if he had been an old friend. He desired the nurse to watch Madame de Rochequillon, and to call him the moment she awakened. The mistress of the house withdrew to her kitchen, which was within the range of the doctor's voice, if he wanted her. Lucille took advantage of the opportunity afforded by her compulsory waiting to obtain a full account of the origin of her grandmother's illness.

The physician warned her to be very cautious in speaking with the invalid, and not to permit her to become excited. It was evident, he said, that her mind was in a most uneasy state, and that she was allowing some thought to prey upon her, thereby retarding

her recovery. Lucille suggested that it might be as well that he should be present during the interview, as he could, in his capacity as medical adviser, check any tendency to excitability on the part of the marquise. To this Doctor Isadore agreed.

They had just made this arrangement when the nurse came to say that madam was awake, and expecting the visitor.

On entering the room where her grandmother lay, Lucille was shocked to see the change in her face and general aspect. Her visage was perfectly pallid, except where two red spots glowed on her cheeks, and her eyes shone out bright and burning. It was with difficulty that Lucille could control her own agitation.

The first words of greeting had scarcely passed when the marquise, half rising, then falling back from exhaustion, gazed earnestly at Lucille.

"Where is your husband? has he come with you?" she asked.

"No," answered Lucille, lowering her eyes.

"Where is he?" eagerly demanded the marquise.

"He is—in Paris," replied Lucille.

"It was to see him that I left England," cried Madame de Rochequillon.

"To see him! Why—what——"

"To see him. Will he come to me if I ask to see him?"

"Yes; I suppose so—I should hope so. Why are you so anxious to see him?"

"I want to put some questions to him. I think I have at length come upon the track."

"The track?" repeated Lucille, bewildered.

"Yes. I feel sure that he can find for me the murderer of my poor boy."

Lucille started back with a look of horror. She fancied that her grandmother's mind was wandering, and that she was already under the influence of the dreaded fever. She glanced towards the doctor, but he was standing at the window, looking into the orchard.

"He was with my boy on that night; he had a letter in his possession— But I will put my questions to him, and he shall answer them."

"Yes, yes," responded Lucille, in a soft tone, wishing to soothe the marquise, "I will ask him to come, and I do not think he will refuse."

"When—when shall I see him?"

"Madam," said Doctor Isadore, coming forward, "you must not agitate yourself in this manner. I must forbid it. If you do not remain tranquil, I shall be obliged to request this lady to withdraw." Under this threat, Madame de Rochequillon controlled herself. She lay back for an instant with her eyes closed; but opening them again, she fixed a piercing glance on the physician.

"I wish to speak for a few moments alone with my granddaughter," she said.

Doctor Isadore looked at Lucille, to warn her, and, bowing politely, withdrew.

"Will you unlock that small desk which is on the table yonder?"

Lucille obeyed.

"Take from the secret drawer a paper—a letter. Read it."

Lucille recognized on the envelope the handwriting of her brother. She ran over the note which it contained, and wondered at the piecing of the paper; but, fearing to agitate the invalid, did not offer any observation. Having read the few lines, she looked up.

"What does it mean?" she asked?

"Do you not see the links of evidence?" cried the marquise, furiously. "You must be blind. But you never cared about the matter."

"The links? How do you mean?"

"Such obtuseness is maddening. That letter was written on the eve of the fatal night when—— Have you looked at the date? It appoints a meeting with the person to whom it is addressed—with one Thomas Dallas. It plainly shows that my poor boy was on intimate terms with that person. This letter was in your husband's possession. Your husband was once in the habit of calling himself by the name of Dallas. He was in all probability with Gustave that night. I want to see him, in order that I may press my inquiries—follow up the clue which I have come upon."

"How did this letter come into your hands?" asked Lucille. Her voice was so faint and husky that it was scarcely audible. It was vague fright which shook her, but she felt as if she had seen a spectre rise from the grave.

The marquise told her she had found it, and

explained that it was to question Sir Thomas Jervoise on the subject that she had hastened from England.

“ Will you let me take this letter, and show it to my husband ? ” asked Lucille.

“ No ; I will see him myself. Give it to me.” She stretched out her emaciated fingers to clutch it. Lucille withheld it while pressing the request.

“ Why should you take it ?—why should you show it to him ? No ; give it to me. Tell him to come to-morrow, as I want to see him—say he *must* come to me.”

“ And supposing he should not consent to come ? ”

“ Why should he refuse ? ” demanded Madame de Rochequillon. “ Why should he refuse to come ? is there any reason why he should refuse ? ”

“ No—merely—— ”

“ Merely what ? ”

Lucille hesitated to tell her that he had already declared his disinclination to visit the sick room, and said—

“ I should be very glad if you would let me take this letter. I will restore it to you.” The

marquise did not answer for several minutes, but finally assented—most reluctantly.

“You will tell him that I wish—that I *must* see him?” she reiterated, as Lucille carefully placed the letter in her little red-and-gold pocket-book. “He must come to-morrow, or if not then, as soon as he can come.” She suddenly began to groan, and lament being chained as she was, and to grow so excited, to speak so loudly, that Lucille was seriously alarmed, and felt relieved when the physician tapped at the door and re-entered the room.

“Pardon my intrusion,” he said, with a significant, rapid glance at Lucille, which told her that he had heard the elevated accents of the invalid, “but I fear the effects which this agitating interview may have upon my patient.”

He spoke politely, yet with the utmost firmness. Lucille understood him, but it was difficult either to calm the perturbation of her grandmother, or to leave her. She was loth to quit her, though she was conscious that her presence served to keep the mind of the marquise in a ferment.

The doctor was obliged to go away at length, not without giving the baroness a parting caution. After a while, Madame de Rochequillon grew sufficiently composed to listen and talk with an appearance of tranquillity. When at last Lucille rose to go, promising to come again early the next morning, she repeated urgently her request, or rather her demand that Sir Thomas Jervoise should visit her.

She was most anxious to induce Lucille to give her the note, and let her go with great unwillingness.

"I shall never pardon your husband if he fails to come," she said. "It may be the request of a dying woman—remember that."

Lucille did not make any decided answer, for she could not promise that her husband would come. She resolved that she would try to persuade him to take a house or a lodging in Sèvres, with the wish to be near her grandmother.

It was with mingled feelings that she quitted the house to return to Paris. She was very pale, and her eyes looked feverish. There was a painful oppression at her heart,

as she tried to pierce the mystery surrounding her. She felt that some crisis—some dreadful crisis—was at hand ; she felt like a person wandering in the dark, knowing there is danger in the way, but not knowing to which side to turn for safety.

This letter—what did it mean ?

Was she a coward to shrink as she did from the thought of coming danger ? But danger in the open field is different from danger caused by lurking, invisible foes, whose presence is declared by some fatal shot.

CHAPTER II.

AGAINST WIND AND TIDE.

LUCILLE returned to town with her brother's letter in her pocket. When she reached the hotel where she and her husband were staying, she found that Sir Thomas had gone out, leaving a message to the effect that he would be back in time for dinner, the hour for which was near at hand, as the evening had already closed in.

She went to her own room, where her maid was waiting, changed her dress, and passed into the *salon*. This apartment, like all *salons* in Parisian or London hotels, did not wear a bright or cheerful aspect; nothing within its precincts suggested a thought of home comfort. Everything was hard, cold, stiff, conventional. Chairs placed at angles

right and left, stood like wooden-faced sentinels, or sullen spies, against the walls. A round table occupied the centre of the room; a couple of card-tables were at either end, a writing-table was stationed before a tall mirror between the windows; one or two forbidding arm-chairs and couches, a piano, a glass over the chimney-piece, composed, with other articles considered indispensable in arranging sitting-rooms, the furniture of this apartment.

Lucille was shivering. The day was one of those chill days which sometimes come near the end of the summer months; but it was not atmospheric influences which affected her. She went to the fire-place directly on entering the room, and stood leaning against the chimney-piece, her foot on the edge of the fender, gazing abstractedly into the heart of the red coals. She was not thinking—she strove not to think—she was simply waiting. So preoccupied was she, however, that she was startled when the door opened and her husband entered. He smiled, and, as he approached her, touched the gaselier, the lights in which had been ignited, but turned

down. In a moment the apartment was brilliantly illuminated. Lucille faced the light, and he immediately noticed her exceeding paleness.

"You are not well," he said, advancing towards her.

"I feel very well," she answered. "I have a slight headache. It will go off—it is nothing."

"You have been overfatigued. It was foolish to rush off before you had had any rest from your journey. You have seen your grandmother, of course?" he asked, carelessly enough. "How did she seem to be?"

Lucille described, in brief terms, the state in which the marquise lay. "She is most anxious to see you."

"To see me?" echoed Tom, in a tone of unmistakable surprise. "What, the deuce, does she want to see me for?"

Lucille hesitated for several minutes.

"She wants to ask you about something," she said at last.

"About what?"

"She wants to learn how much you know of the writer of this note," said Lucille,

abruptly drawing the letter from her pocket, taking it from its envelope, and extending it towards him.

Had he come prepared for this fatal interview, he could not have placed himself more advantageously; he was standing with his back to the light, while Lucille faced it. She was not able, therefore, to see the changes in his countenance. Had she seen the ghastly pallor which overspread his face, she might have reasonably felt alarmed. The blow was so totally unexpected that he was at first entirely at a loss how to parry it. Truly the tide was against him now.

"Who did write this?" he asked, finding that she remained silent, with her eyes fixed on him.

"As it is addressed to yourself, I think you ought to know the writer."

"It is not addressed to myself—what an extraordinary idea!—it is addressed to——"

"Why do you desire to maintain a mystery? Why should you deny that it is addressed to you?" demanded Lucille, with some irritation.

"So, madame la marquise wants to see me, to put me under some absurd cross-examina-

tion about this letter?" He chose to ignore her intimation that she believed he was uttering a falsehood in denying that he was the person to whom the letter was written. "If she gets me down there—where is it?—she will prove to be more clever than I gave her credit for. What did she know of the writer of this letter?"

Lucille looked steadily at him, but was baffled in her effort at observation by the way in which he stood against the light. She had not even the assistance of the firelight, for the sparkle had subsided into dull glowing red.

"I don't see," he continued, "what business she has to poke her nose into affairs that do not concern her. What was the writer to her or she to the writer that she should trouble herself about him?"

"The ill-fated writer of that letter," said Lucille, speaking very slowly, "was Gustave de Lagny Charteris, my only brother."

Tom Wynstyn retreated two or three steps, with an exclamation of horror. "Your brother!" he ejaculated. "May God forgive me!"

He leaned his elbows on the corner of the fringed board covering the chimney-piece, and buried his face in his hands. The paper dropped from his fingers. Lucille caught up the letter, and replacing it in the envelope, put it carefully into her pocket. She waited for some minutes, in perfect silence, feeling that some awful revelation was about to be made. "Your brother!" cried Tom, in a voice so unlike his own that Lucille shuddered. "And I killed him! May God have mercy on me! I believe I am the most miserable wretch on earth!"

Lucille did not speak; she was too much terrified, yet her outward calmness did not desert her. Only she was obliged to sink into a chair, and almost to cling to the arms for support. Her entire frame was trembling like an aspen.

"How, in the name of Satan and all his furies, did that letter fall into the hands of your grandmother?" asked Tom, presently.

She tried to speak, but the words would not pass her dry lips.

"Fate is clearly against me," said he, as if to himself. "Come, I may as well relieve my

conscience at one stroke." He told her everything, with something of the cool indifference of demeanour which characterized him on ordinary occasions. It was not until he came to detail to her the history of that night when he had slain her brother that this hardness was dissolved, and he fell on his knees at her feet.

"God is my witness," he said, raising his hands solemnly, his voice trembling, "that I did not mean to harm him. That face has haunted me, until often I would have given up my own life to have brought back his. You may not believe me, but—but—I have no blood on my hands, save his, poor boy; and if a profound grief and remorse could expiate my—my crime——" He rose, and began pacing to and fro for a few minutes, then throwing himself on a low couch, buried his face in his hands, and wept bitterly for some time. Lucille sat perfectly still—she scarcely seemed to breathe, her arms lay loosely by her side, her gaze fixed on vacancy.

"You now know all," said Tom, at last, lifting up his head. "I, too, know something of which I was ignorant an hour ago. If

ignorance be bliss, knowledge may sometimes be torture. Come, what are we going to do next?" The question was asked with something of his ordinary insolent carelessness. He waited for her to speak, but the only sign she gave of understanding him was to turn her eyes towards him, without looking directly at him.

"You see," he resumed, as he began to slowly tear his handkerchief in shreds, unconscious of what he was about, "you comprehend, firstly, that, owing to the interference of my father, I shall be obliged, not only to relinquish my—to—to give up the title and estates which I have—which have been now for some little time in my possession, but I—shall be obliged to announce my own death to the world at large. You understand what I am saying?" looking at her as he spoke.

A very slight inclination of the head was the only evidence that she did understand.

"You clearly understand that I am in a remarkably unpleasant situation? I am not going to pretend that anybody is to blame for it but myself. I am like a rat caught in a trap. What course do you intend to take?

My courage has all evaporated—I shall struggle no longer. I throw myself on your mercy.”

A sickly smile lingered at the corners of Lucille’s lips for an instant, then faded away.

“I do not sue for pity—I know I do not deserve it,—and if you mete out justice to me, I shall have a sorry time of it. Lucille, whatever doom you pronounce, I will submit to it.”

“May God in His infinite mercy have pity on me,” said Lucille, in a hollow voice. “I am not your judge, I am only your fellow-sufferer.”

Rising with difficulty, she took from her pocket the fatal letter, and flung it into the fire. By some strange revulsion of feeling, her love, which had been ebbing away for some weeks, revived in full force. She saw that the cold, half mocking tone assumed by Tom was the cover of a stinging remorse and shame. She felt that he told the truth when declaring that not for an instant had he meditated taking the life of her brother. True, he acknowledged having led the poor youth astray—having even induced him to commit a

theft; but yet, as she said, she was not his judge.

"You are an angel of mercy," cried her husband. "And I—I believe the only way in which I could fitly show my gratitude for such unparalleled generosity would be to leave you, and go where you might never hear of me more."

Lucille leant her aching head against the velvet edge of the chimney-piece, and broke into a silent passion of tears. Tom's first impulse was to approach her, and seek to comfort her, but he checked himself, and resting his arm on the back of a chair close to the couch on which he was sitting, he watched her quivering form as her soundless sobs shook it. As she thus wept in this quiet manner, the door was thrown open, and a servant appeared. It was the inevitable announcement of dinner, which comes day after day, be there joy or sorrow, grief or laughter, in the house. The man instantly closed the door again, without betraying by a sign that he was conscious of having witnessed any unusual scene. Lucille started up, and endeavoured to restrain the tears which still flowed.

"Never, in the whole course of my life before," began Tom, in a very low voice, "did I realize the fact, as I do now, that I am an utter, irretrievable specimen of the thorough-paced villain. I feel such remorse at this moment, that I could willingly throw myself out of the window yonder, if that would in any way benefit you. I never knew I had a conscience before. I begin to wish I had never been born."

A long and painful silence succeeded these words, broken by his continuing, in the same subdued tone, "What to do I don't know. I must relinquish all pretensions to——" A slight grimace supplied the rest of the sentence. "For if I do not, I feel as certain that my—that he will be down upon me, and—but just see what a devil of a situation I place you in. Of course, nothing but my death, or the open acknowledgment of the—fraud—which I have—which—— See here, I cannot now undo what I have done, but I swear to you, from my heart of hearts, that I bitterly repent of the wrong which I have committed against you."

"I believe that you do," said Lucille, approaching him.

He seized her hands, and covered them with kisses. "Is there anything, anything?" he cried, "that I can do which may be some atonement? Sir Thomas Jervoise must be dead to the world, but what about the husband of the Baroness Deveril? I know not from what point of view my conduct looks blackest. Tell me what to do, and I will follow your advice—your commands implicitly."

"I cannot think," answered Lucille. "My brain is stunned to all sensation save a dull pain. May God have pity on us both!" She went over to one of the windows, and pushing aside the curtain, laid her burning forehead against the cold glass. Presently the servant again appeared, to repeat his mild intimation that dinner was served.

"Perhaps it would be prudent to go into the dining-room?" said Lucille, wearily, when he had again retired. "It will be as well not to give the servants cause to wonder and gossip."

She passed into her own room, to bathe her face, and then followed her husband to the dining-room. They scarcely pretended to

partake of the dishes successively set before them, and neither spoke a word until the wine and fruit were placed on the table, and the servants had withdrawn. Sir Thomas was the first to break the painful silence. "I do believe there is only one course before me," he said, moodily.

"And that——?"

His look was sufficient.

"Of such a course, you must not think for an instant," cried Lucille, her very lips growing white.

"That would simplify everything."

Lucille rose and passed round the table swiftly to where he sat. Placing her hand upon his shoulder, she looked intently into his eyes. "Promise me," she exclaimed, tightening her grasp unconsciously, "swear to me that you will never think of such a dreadful, awful alternative. Think for one instant of what heavy added misery you would entail upon me. Think, it is the last resource of a coward. But I will not attempt to argue with you. I only ask you to promise me that you will never carry such a horrible threat into effect—a threat, for it is nothing more."

"Then what, in the name of fortune, am I to do?"

"Not that, not that."

"See here, I am fairly driven into a corner; but, however, make your mind easy. I believe I have not the courage to make an end of it in the way you fear."

"But you give me your promise?"

"Yes, I give you my promise."

Lucille breathed a sigh, and returned to her place.

"I suppose the only thing I can do is to go to England, and try to make terms with my father. I can do nothing here. I must go to England. I think I shall start to-night." Lucille had nothing to offer in contravention of this sudden resolution. He rang for his servant, and ordered him to pack up some necessary articles for a hasty journey. In two hours he was on his way to England—not for the object which he had assigned, however.

The unhappy wife spent the greater part of the night on her knees, in earnest and passionate supplication, weeping bitterly. She was tortured by the thought that she had not

done right, that she did not know what was right; by the feeling that she was so helpless, so weak in judgment. Yet it would seem as if women must always err on the side of pity; justice seems to be more of a masculine than a feminine virtue. Brutus throws his son over the battlements with his own hands. Teresa Balducci aids the escape of the man who has slain her child.

“What can I do, O my God?” she cried, in a transport of anguish. She was going to cry, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us,” when two thoughts made her hang her head still lower—the one, that she was not the one who had been injured, the other that, by uttering this invocation, she was calling down, as it were, a curse upon her grandmother. It is so hard to leave things in the Father’s hands. It is so difficult to remember what an insignificant unit one is in the world. There is such a strong temptation to try to take the balance, and weigh out justice in our own way. It is so natural to lift the sword to cut the Gordian knot across, it seems so easy a solution to a dilemma. Often there is a greater heroism

in patience than in the most active of virtues. But patience is such a homely quality, boasting no pride, or pomp, or golden circumstance. Human nature thinks justice ought to be speedy and crushing. It is only the Great Judge of all the earth who can say to the criminal—"Go, and sin no more." That part of the night which was not passed on her knees, was spent by Lucille in walking to and fro with unsteady steps. What to say to her grandmother when they should meet in the morning she knew not. Her prayers had brought her little comfort; perhaps she had not prayed aright. She felt as if her prayers were of no avail; and then she fell on her knees to plead for pardon and counsel, only to rise again and pace to and fro in the same fevered way.

In the morning she threw off her garments, and flung herself for a few minutes on her bed, fearing to arouse wonder and suspicion in the mind of her maid should the girl come in and find that she had remained up during the night. The precaution was of very little use, for the quick eyes of the young woman instantly detected the fact of her mistress's

sleepless agitation. Fortunately, however, her idea was that a matrimonial tiff had sent her master away to England, and caused her mistress a night of anguish. In this opinion she was confirmed by the notions of the other servants.

Lucille went through the form of breakfasting, and then started for Sèvres. It was some hours before the marquise could have expected her arrival. The morning sun was bathing the house in a golden glory when Lucille stopped at the door, and a strange atmosphere of peace seemed to encircle the entire dwelling.

The good woman of the house greeted Lucille with a long face. The invalid was by no means so well as she had been the day before, she told Lucille. Indeed, she confessed, on being urged by Lucille's questions, that the doctor had that morning expressed an opinion that the agitation induced by the interview of the preceding afternoon would in all probability seriously retard her recovery.

When Lucille entered the sick-chamber, she found the marquise lying motionless, her

burning eyes fixed on the door. The tray which contained her breakfast was standing on a little table, and it was evident that she had touched nothing beyond half a cup of chocolate. A dark frown distorted Madame de Rochequillon's face when she saw that Lucille was alone.

"Well?" she cried, abruptly, without waiting for Lucille to speak. "Has he come?"

Lucille tried to divert her thoughts for a few moments by tender inquiries, but she was too impatient to submit to this. "Has he come?" she repeated, endeavouring to raise herself.

"No, he has not come," said Lucille, in a very low tone, sitting down by the bedside, and untying her bonnet, which she threw on a small chest of drawers behind her.

"Not come, not come!" echoed the marquise. "Why has he not? Has he refused then? Is he afraid? Has he refused?"

"No, he has not refused," said Lucille.

"You asked him to come?"

"I did."

"And he has not come—why?—where is he?—why is this?" she cried.

"You must not agitate yourself in this manner, dear grandma. The doctor has——"

"Why has he not come?" fiercely cried the marquise, raising her voice to a scream. "Tell me that."

"If you agitate yourself in this manner, dear grandmamma, I must leave you."

The marquise looked at her, dilating her eyes like a madwoman. "Very well," she said, "I will be perfectly quiet. But you must not keep me in this suspense. Tell me what happened when—— Where is the letter which I entrusted to you? You must restore it to me."

Lucille locked her hands together tightly, and compressed her lips. "Dearest grandmamma," she said, softly, "this thirst for blood is a very terrible thing."

"To what end is this moralizing?" demanded the grim old woman. "First, give me my letter."

"I cannot give it to you because——"

"Because?" repeated the marquise.

"Because I have destroyed it," boldly answered Lucille.

"Destroyed it! How dared you do such a

thing—how dared you, I say? It belonged to me—you have not dared to destroy it?”

“Do you not think, dear grandma, that Heaven will mete out to us mercy according as we mete it out to others?”

“I tell you, I do not want your moralizings. You have destroyed my letter—I see, I see—your husband will not come. You have destroyed my letter to shield him, because he is the murderer of my boy.”

Lucille sank down on her knees, and buried her face in the bed-clothes. The marquise threw up her arms wildly, and tried to rise, but pain caused her to fall back on her pillows with a groan. Then she began laughing and lamenting so hysterically that Lucille was obliged to rise and hold her by force, and endeavour—vainly—to pacify her, and the good woman of the house came running in with a face full of affright.

For hours Lucille continued to hold the raving invalid in her arms—trying to soothe her, talking to her as one would talk to a fractious child, arranging her pillows, bathing her head and face and hands with eau de Cologne, and watching for some gleam of

reason in those terrible eyes. Once she begged of Madame Jacques to send for the doctor, but the messenger who was despatched returned to say that he was from home, and not expected back until the afternoon. It was frightful to Lucille to listen to the ravings of the marquise. The one idea of revenge was paramount, and the threats, curses, blasphemies which she poured forth unceasingly were very horrible—all uttered in loud, piercing tones. Lucille drew a deep breath when at length Doctor Isadore came in. He had been informed of the state of affairs by Madame Jacques, and he looked at his patient, then at Lucille, with a serious face.

“What has happened?” he asked. “She has evidently received some dreadful shock. This is most unfortunate.”

“She has received a shock,” answered Lucille, who had fallen into a chair, fairly exhausted. A sudden impulse seized her, and she told him, fully, the frightful secret which had been weighing on her grandmother’s mind. She spoke in low, hurried accents, fearful lest the very walls might catch and echo her words. The recital occupied only

a few minutes. She concealed nothing, not even the fact of her husband's admissions, and of her having destroyed the letter written by her brother. The physician listened in dead silence, not interrupting her even by a question or a sign, looking fixedly at some object which faced him, and never changing his attitude, which was that of profound attention.

"The first thing we must do," he said, at length, throwing back his head, "will be to see to our patient. She is now in a most precarious state. I will candidly tell you, that I think her days are numbered. The shock has been too great for her—even with the utmost quiet, it would have been a perilous accident to a woman of her age."

"Whatever your directions may be, I shall follow them implicitly," said Lucille.

"I can give you very faint hopes of her recovery. Indeed, I think you must prepare for the worst. I doubt if she will regain her senses at all, and I believe that in a day or two all will be over for her in this world. You will doubtless send for the priest, that she may receive the last offices of the Church? Are you a Catholic?"

"No. I and my grandmother belong to the Reformed Church."

"Then you will exercise your own discretion. I, of course, shall not offer you any counsel as to the worldly affairs of your relative, but I trust they are all arranged? I shall send you a soporific, which must be administered immediately, and I will return as soon as I can. I am obliged to leave you now."

Neither that day, nor during the night, nor during the fast-flying hours which succeeded each other for three or four days, did Lucille quit her grandmother, merely hastily snatching sustenance and repose at stray moments.

The opinion of the physician was only too well grounded. On the morning of the fourth day after that last fatal interview, the soul of the grim old marquise winged its way to its Creator. She never recovered her senses, never was again conscious of anything belonging to this world. Doctor Isadore never recurred to the secret revealed by Lucille. Every day she half feared, half hoped, that he would speak of it, but he never gave her reason to suppose that he bestowed any second

thought upon the matter. The truth was, he did not know what to do, and being a man fond of his own ease, and averse to meddling with subjects of a perplexing nature, he deemed his wisest course would be to judiciously let the secret remain one for ever as far as he was concerned.

Once Lucille received a few lines from her husband, merely mentioning his safe arrival in England, and promising to write soon at greater length.

The Marquise de Rochequillon was committed to her last resting place, and Lucille was at liberty to return to Paris. Doctor Isadore exchanged a brief farewell, plainly showing by his manner that he had no wish to recur to the painful secret which she had confided to him; and then she left Sèvres for ever, going once more to her temporary home in Paris. She could not write to her husband, for he had given her no address in his letter, and she was entirely ignorant of where he might be. She could only presume from the postmark that he was in London. So she was obliged to wait with enforced patience, fearing, hoping, dreading ills, tortured by a thousand varied feelings.

CHAPTER III.

DRIFTING WITH THE CURRENT.

ON arriving in London, Tom Wynston took an obscure lodging in a house situate in one of the streets off the Strand. He never went near his father. His time was fully occupied in gathering together as much money as he could from the agent, alleging, as a reason for requiring funds in this unexpected manner, that he wished to buy a quantity of expensive jewellery for his wife. From fear of exciting wonder or suspicion in the mind of the agent, he was careful not to be in any way exorbitant in his requirements. Once or twice he wrote to his wife, always without giving her any address; and she did not venture to send a letter to any of the houses where he might be supposed to go, lest she should betray him in any way.

All his arrangements having been made, Tom wrote to his wife, telling her of his intention to rejoin her in Paris in five or six days. This letter was a longer one than any he had hitherto written. He had not even yet fully resolved on what he was going to do. Perfectly well he knew that he must give up the possessions which he had unrighteously grasped ; but what was going to happen he did not know. It was his habit to take everything in such a reckless, "something will turn up" sort of fashion. He found that, no matter how he viewed his position, he could see nothing feasible, no tangible way of getting out of his difficulties, so thought it best to float with the current for the present, to wait until his father took another step, and then to go whichever way he was driven. So he wrote to his wife, to say that he should be with her in a few days.

Lucille was relieved by the receipt of this letter, vague and unsatisfactory as it was when touching on the future. She was truly glad of the complete solitude in which she was plunged at this time, for she could give way to the terrible burden of grief and care

which oppressed her, without feeling that she must maintain a tolerably calm face before the world. Her servants, it is true, were of opinion that her days and nights of tears and prayers and utter prostration were caused much more by the abrupt departure of their master than by the death of their mistress's grandmother. That these good people would attach any particular importance to the absence of her husband, did not occur to Lucille, and she was spared this further annoyance. Turn which way she would, she could see no glimmering of light. She had not advanced one step further towards a decision as to the right course to be taken than she had on that dreadful evening when the fatal secret was revealed to her by her husband. Argue or view the subject as she might, it still seemed to her that the question which was before her to be solved was a Gordian knot to be cut, not unravelled by human skill. It seemed to her that, as she reflected, the words rang in her ears—"Vengeance is Mine—vengeance is Mine." She felt as if she *dared* not move one way or another; yet, to stand calmly by and take no step, appeared

almost a crime, an injustice to the dead, a coward laxity, for which she should have to answer one day. She prayed for help, and none was vouchsafed her, although she prayed with tears of anguish and despair.

The day on which Tom was to arrive came, passed, and he did not appear. Two or three days elapsed, and still he did not come; and, to add to the extreme anxiety which Lucille suffered, she received no letter from him. She was resolved then to go at once to England. Some four or five days passed without seeing this resolution put into practice. She was afraid to quit Paris—afraid to move.

Lucille was sitting wearily in her drawing-room, too weak and listless to do anything—almost too languid to think—when a visitor was announced. She started. A horrible tightening of the heart seized her, and she became perfectly pale. “For what am I to prepare?” was her thought, when he advanced into the room.

He was the managing clerk of Messrs. Rashleigh and Ponsonby; a man with a mild address, and not unprepossessing aspect, of

middle height, with a light red beard and cool gray eyes. His face told her that he had come with evil tidings of some nature—of what nature? She tried to discover this by his manner before he spoke. The hesitancy of his address did not assist her in deciphering the signification of his grave countenance. They had never met before, and this increased the difficulty which he obviously experienced in breaking such intelligence as he bore.

“Madam,” he said, with an effort, “I presume—I should hope, that you have been—I say ‘hope,’ because I fear to——”

“Sir,” interrupted Lucille, “whatever you may have to tell me, I beg of you to tell me at once, without further preliminary. I can suffer anything better than suspense. I will frankly inform you that I have been expecting my husband from England for several days—he has not come, and he has not written to explain his non-arrival. I have no idea of what may be the cause of——” She paused.

“Then, madam, my task will be a painful one.”

Lucille grasped the arm of the chair on which she was seated, and felt that she grew deadly pale.

“As you desire me to inform you of the worst at once, I will tell you that—that Sir Thomas Jervoise—was—was lost in the *Esmeralda* steamer, which——”

A rush of blood behind Lucille's ears drowned what her visitor was saying, and she was obliged to ask him to ring for some water.

“Pardon me ; I did not exactly understand what you said to me,” she said, when she had drunk half a glass of water.

He repeated his information.

“A fatal collision took place on the night of the thirteenth instant, in the Channel. You may remember, the night was fearfully tempestuous and dark. The *Esmeralda* had not proceeded far on its voyage from Dover to Calais when she was run into by an American barque, struck on her forequarter, which immediately sank. A good deal of blame seems to be attached to the conduct of the captain of the American vessel. The ship—the *Esmeralda*—was sunk, with all her passengers and crew—not a soul was saved. The captain of the *Esmeralda* did everything that human being could do to rescue his men and pas-

sengers ; but—I shall not give you additional pain by describing the scene as it has been detailed to me, madam.”

It did not matter much, for Lucille did not hear one word of what he was saying ; and this, after a few minutes, he perceived. She was conscious of the one great fact, that her husband had been drowned at sea. For that she had been utterly unprepared. She sat in a rigid attitude, gazing fixedly at her informant, although she saw him not—her imagination had conjured up the presentment of the awful catastrophe at sea, with horrible reality, and she was gazing at that. Presently she caught some words which her visitor was addressing to her in a particularly earnest manner, and found that he was touching on business matters apologetically, pleading necessity as an excuse for bringing legal affairs forward at such a time.

She rose, resting her hand on the arm of her chair for support. “ Pardon me,” she said, “ I am totally incapable just now of even comprehending what you say to me. Will you see my own lawyer ? ”

He bowed, and with a few words, left her.

When the door closed, Lucille tottered to a lounge, with the air of a blind person, her arms extended before her, her face contracted by absolute pain. The room seemed whirling round, and she had hardly reached the lounge when she fainted away. Her maid coming into the room by accident an hour later, found her mistress lying perfectly motionless, pale, and scarcely able to raise herself.

These successive shocks resulted in reducing Lucille's system to such a state of weakness that she was entirely confined to her sitting-room, although she had no positive illness. She suffered from such a fearful depression that it was impossible to rouse her, and her medical adviser began to be seriously alarmed, for more reasons than one. Change of scene he earnestly desired for her, but she was at present really too weak to be moved with safety. After all, as her disorder was mental, she would have carried it with her wherever she went, and so she told him. Grief for the sudden death of her husband was supposed to be the reason of her illness.

As she knew scarcely any one in Paris, she was every day alone, the dreadful monotony

of each day only varied by the visit of the physician. A little while ago, she had congratulated herself on being alone ; now solitude had grown to be a terror. For perhaps the first time in her life, she learnt what utter loneliness was like ; and, curiously, she felt its influence terribly. Unable to read, without a companion with whom she could converse even on the most ordinary topics, she lay in a strange listless state, caused by illness and solitude. It is wonderful how, by a wise and beautiful order, human nature is dependent on the company of its kind, and the greatest anguish which can be inflicted on a living creature is exclusion from the society of its fellows. Doctor Antoine advised her to have a companion ; but although she consented to enter into such an arrangement, some weeks must elapse before a lady could be found who would be suitable in all respects. Within a few days, her consent was suddenly withdrawn, and she peremptorily requested the doctor to discontinue his search for a *dame de compagnie*. She did not allege any reasons for thus abruptly changing her mind.

“Merely a woman’s caprice,” she said,

laughingly. "It is a woman's privilege to say Yes and No in a breath." But when he was gone, she threw herself upon her face on the sofa, and broke into a passion of tears, tears of grief and horror—tears of agony excited by a reason which causes women ordinarily to shed tears of joy and thankfulness. She earnestly desired to know where the father of her lost husband was to be found, for she wished to write to him—to see him. Of his possible place of abode, however, she was utterly ignorant.

Mr. Wynstyn had heard of the terrible collision, and had seen the name of his son in the list of passengers who had gone down. At first he had thought that this was a ruse, and could not believe that his only child was dead. He could not credit the dreadful news; he could not but fancy that this was the carrying out of a plan to escape discovery and consequent punishment. On making the most rigorous inquiries, he found that there was no possible reason to doubt that Tom had embarked. Everything seemed to assure him that his son had really perished on that fatal night. A revulsion of feeling seized the un-

happy father when fully convinced that his son was lost to him for ever. He accused himself of having been the means of sending his only child to an untimely death.

While yet in town, whither he had gone to pursue the investigation on which he entered to satisfy himself that his son was lost, he happened to learn that the widow of the late baronet was in Paris, alone, and, it was believed, ill. He determined to see her at once. With this design he wrote to her, asking her to appoint any time which might be convenient for her to receive him. It unfortunately happened that he did not direct his letter correctly. The consequence was, that it never reached its destination. He waited for a week, remaining in town in order to be able to go to Paris the moment he heard from the baroness. Then he wrote a second time, and waited another week. This time he wrote most urgently, requesting an interview, and alluding to his former letter.

“She may be ill, and unable to write,” he thought. “Yet why does not somebody about her write in her name?—why does not she tell the doctor, even, to write a line? No, her

silence must be intentional. Perhaps she may be lying ill of a fever, or something of that kind, which causes her to be unable to read or understand what I have written, and those about her may not feel at liberty to tamper with her letters."

He resolved to wait for a fortnight, and then to write a third time. Having despatched his letter, he returned to the country.

In his haste to send off this third letter, which he posted with his own hand, he forgot to direct the envelope. It thus happened that it was opened and returned by the Post Office. But it was addressed to the lodgings which he had just quitted; and as he had omitted to give the people of the house any clue to his address in Derfordshire, although it was written in the body of the letter, they simply put it aside to be given to him should he call or send, and it remained stuck in the frame of one of the chimney-glasses, getting flyblown and dusty, for he never returned to these lodgings again. Hearing nothing from Lucille, Mr. Wynstyn at last determined that she did not want to see him. He resolved not to lose sight of her

altogether, for certain reasons. He had made some cautious inquiries through his solicitor, and found that she had no intention of taking a farthing from the Jervoise estate. From this he judged that she was aware of the dishonesty of her late husband.

Lucille's solitude was broken in upon by an unexpected and, as it proved, a most agreeable visit.

The young widow was sitting alone one afternoon, when a couple of cards were brought to her by a servant. Lucille started up, and eagerly desired the servant to request the ladies to come to her room, as she was too weak to venture into the *salon*. In a few minutes Ettie and her step-mother were with her.

Little Ettie forgot all her animosity against Lucille ; and when she found herself beside her former friend, she threw her arms about her, and almost sobbed over her.

"How thin and pale you look!" she exclaimed, between the kisses which she showered upon her. "You do not look a bit like yourself—poor dear!" Ettie ran on so fast with her chatter, that Mrs. Alvanley .

thought it useless to attempt keeping up with her, and saying that she fancied the two friends would be more free to talk if left together, went away, to do some shopping, telling Ettie she should return for her in about an hour's time.

The presence of Ettie was like a gleam of sunshine. Lucille found her former pupil quite a different creature from what she had been in those old days which now seemed so distant. In many respects, Ettie was improved—in many others, Lucille could not help wishing she had not altered. She was full of lightness and gaiety, but she was noisy and vehement in her mirth, and she incessantly chattered—preoccupied with herself and her own concerns, caring apparently very little for the affairs of any one else.

She was going to be married, she told Lucille, with evident pride and delight. She was going to be married to the Marquis of Carluthen. He was so nice, such a dear, good darling. Fond of him?—yes, she should think so. He was the dearest pet in the world; he gave her such beautiful things, and was always so amiable. She showed Lucille

several trinkets which she had about her, bracelets, rings, her ear-rings, all given by him. Even the dainty pale pearl-gray gloves which she wore, he had given her "the darling." She was the happiest creature in the world, she thought. She could talk of hardly anything but this dear love. "Oh, if anything happened to hinder her marriage, her heart would break, she knew it would." She had apparently quite forgotten that she ever cared for Sir Thomas Jervoise, for although she spoke of his death with bated breath, it was merely from sympathy with Lucille. Yet her love for the marquis was undoubtedly a totally different sentiment from that which she had cherished for the baronet. Perhaps it was a sounder, more healthy feeling, and promised better for her future welfare.

She was so sorry, she said, that Lucille could not be at her wedding. She was to be married in two months; she said this so blithely that Lucille could see how happy the prospect made her. It was true she dilated as much on her dresses and anticipated presents, and of the free life she meant to lead after her marriage, as she did of the man

with whom she was about to unite her fate. Lucille looked at the young girl in silent amazement. Ettie was changed—changed in almost every possible way. She had mixed so much, day after day, week after week, in the best society, that insensibly she had acquired the air and tone of those with whom she so constantly came in contact. She had not, it must be confessed, gained the demeanour of a woman of fashion, but her oddity had softened into a quaint originality, her occasional vehemence was now piquant, her queerness had become archness, or a graceful pout. In mind, in heart, she seemed a completely different being to the girl whom Lucille had known a year before. Was it better that the volcano should be extinct, and that mosses and innocent grasses should grow around its crater? Was the volcano dead?

Lucille put question after question, with the object of ascertaining the state of her mind. To every inquiry Lucille chose to make, she replied with the utmost frankness. But this candour may or may not have been perfectly real. A brilliant essayist says that every human being has in his heart a certain

chamber, into which none beside himself and the Divinity ever enters. One thing was very palpable—she did not regard Lord Carluthen as girls ordinarily regard the man they wish to marry. She was fond of him, undoubtedly; but she called him laughingly her “big brother,” and talked of him without reserve, with the freedom which young women use in speaking of their brothers. Not a flickering of the eyelashes, not a transient blush, not the slightest change of voice, betrayed more than a warm affection; not a trace of love or passion was observable. It was also evident, however, that there was no danger of her ever loving again as she once loved. It was fortunate, too, that the Marquis of Carluthen was a man on whom profound love or intense passion would have been wasted, if it had not proved to him a bore.

It was a curious study. Lucille tried to get at Ettie’s real thoughts, and although Ettie answered every question with the candour apparently of a child, Lucille felt conscious that she was merely on the threshold, when there was a pretence of admittance to the innermost halls. Ettie herself was aware of the re-

ticence. Hers was one of those complex, puzzling natures, which defy investigation. The outward freedom of her manner, the readiness wherewith she replied to questions, the frankness with which she seemingly bestowed her confidence, gave her character a superficial aspect of simplicity.

Of only one point could Lucille be certain, which was, that Ettie had changed, changed most markedly and wonderfully since she had first known her. For the better in many ways; especially to the casual observer, she was most advantageously altered. But she had lost all trace of the youthful, perhaps childish cast of thought which had formerly been one of her greatest attractions. Her manner was light and childish even yet, but she was hard; critical in her observations on people and things; cynical very frequently when speaking of the finest affections and feelings of human nature. And when Lucille once attempted to touch on some religious question, she shrank within herself, and being obliged to answer at length, shocked Lucille so much by her laughing manner of flinging off the subject, that in her turn the young

baroness shrank back. It was perceptible, however, that Ettie was not in the slightest degree conscious of these changes in herself.

The two friends enjoyed a pleasant gossip for perhaps a couple of hours, and were still talking over their luncheon, when Ettie's step-mother came for her. After that, Ettie came nearly every day to visit Lucille, until she was whisked off by her aunt to some other part of the world.

Then Lucille abruptly dismissed her few servants, quitted the hotel in Paris, and without taking even a personal attendant with her, set off alone for Switzerland. Never having, during her entire life, travelled unaccompanied, she found the journey most irksome and disagreeable. Even the railway officials and porters seemed to regard it as something strange that a lady of such extreme beauty, and of so peculiarly distinguished an air, should be travelling unattended. The freshness of her widow's weeds, and the profound preoccupation visible upon her face, gained for her sympathy and courtesy on all sides, however. On arriving at Dome, she saw that it would be more difficult to escape observa-

tion if she had no servants than if she had a perfect retinue, so she engaged a maid and a courier. She had, before starting on her journey, assumed a convenient travelling name—*Madame de Lagny*.

The solitude to which she was voluntarily condemned—a solitude all the more painful and real in the midst of the crowds through which she passed during this journey—was making terrible havoc of her nervous system. By the time she finally reached Lugano, she was positively worn out. She secured quiet lodgings in one of the most retired parts of the neighbourhood of Lugano. Rendered morbid by long brooding over one fatal thought, she had resolved on a dangerous course of action. And then the dark winter nights came, and the sombre days, relieved by cold gleams of yellow sunshine; and all the time she was alone.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT HAPPENED AT LUGANO.

MR. WYNSTYN, although frustrated in his wish to see Lucille, had continued to follow her movements by means of his agent. Even when she went to live at Lugano, fancying herself in complete isolation, he still had regular intelligence regarding her. At last he received such information as obliged him to go to Lugano, with the fixed determination to have an interview with her, whether she were willing or not to receive him.

A day or two after his arrival at Lugano, he went out, with the intention of boldly presenting himself at the door of the house where she was staying, and demanding an interview. As he crossed the road, a young woman, dressed in the deep mourning robes

of a widow, issued, alone, from the house, and walked slowly along in the direction of Carona, under the shadow of the chestnut trees. She was walking with almost a listless air, her eyes bent on the ground, taking no notice whatever of the lovely glimpses of the lake occasionally visible between the trees, rippling in the sunlight.

Mr. Wynstyn drew back, and followed her. He was so much struck with compassion on observing her utterly depressed mien, that he did not like to disturb her, or speak to her suddenly. He kept her in sight, hoping for some favourable opportunity of addressing her, but walking many yards behind her.

She had walked for perhaps a mile, when she came to a small wooden seat by the side of the road, and opening an umbrella which she had carried, sank down on the bench, and taking a book from her leather bag, began to read.

Mr. Wynstyn's repugnance to break in upon her comparative calm grew more decided, and he absolutely walked past her, without turning his head. She looked up as she heard his step, gazing after him for a few moments without

seeming to realize his presence, and then her eyes fell again upon the open page. The painful duty which he had come all the way from England to perform must, however, be executed. Mr. Wynstyn sat down on a second bench some yards further down the road, and looked at the drooping figure, for perhaps a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, intently, remarking the graceful outlines of her form, the unconscious beauty of her attitude, the statuesque flow of her sombre draperies, the now pathetic loveliness of her face. The more he regarded her, the more favourably was he impressed by her. At last he quitted his seat, and walked very slowly towards her. She looked up again as she heard his approach, and this time her eyes had an expression which showed that at length she saw him, although she had not the most distant idea that he was anything but a casual tourist.

He stopped when he had reached the seat where she was resting, and raised his hat. She thought he was about to make some inquiry regarding some route which he wished to take, and she looked at him without any

fear, waiting for him to speak. "Madam," he said, in English, after an evident pause, the slightest possible trembling making his voice falter, "I believe I have the honour to address the Baroness Deveril?"

Lucille's eyes dilated; she felt as if frozen into stone. She could not remove her gaze from his face, and she was unable to reply.

"I have come from England, with the object of seeing you. I arrived yesterday."

"Of seeing me? For what purpose—with what intention?" She scarcely knew her own voice, it was so strange and husky.

"Madam," he said, with the same old-fashioned formal politeness, "I wrote to you thrice while you were in Paris, and you declined to reply to my letters."

"Wrote to me?—I don't know what you are talking about," she cried in desperation.

"Who are you?"

"Will you permit——?" he said, indicating with his hand the unoccupied part of the wooden bench, and then sitting down. "I am—the father of—the unhappy man who called himself Sir Thomas Jervoise. My name is Wynstyn."

A terrible cry escaped Lucille. She tried to speak, but her voice refused to obey her.

"I am sorry to be the means of giving you pain—very, very sorry," he said. "But I have been obliged to persist in my desire to see you. You must feel that it was impossible for me to explain to you in my letters what I wished to impress upon you in speaking with you. Circumstances have forced a duty upon me which I must fulfil at all hazards. This duty has become doubly, trebly painful since—the death—of—my son." His voice sank almost to a whisper as he uttered these words.

"What do you require of me? I earnestly wished to see you."

"You wished—do you still desire that we should understand each other?"

She shrank back. There was a slight unconscious sternness in his accent.

"You received my letters? If you wished for an interview with me, why did you refuse to accede to my most urgent request that you would permit me to see you?"

"I never received your letters."

"That seems incomprehensible. However, we will let it pass. The delay has not been

productive of much mischief. I shall be obliged to speak of some matters inevitably trying to us both, but which I must enter on."

Lucille bowed her head between her hands, without replying.

"You are aware of the circumstances of the past life of—of my late son?"

"I am. He himself——" Her voice failed her.

"From the time he quitted me, I sought for him, all over the world, I may say. I did not find him until—until very shortly before his death. Of the sorrowful nature of the meeting, I need not speak. I pray God you may never know the bitterness of loving a child—an only child—whose heart is hardened against you. I pass over the details of our conversation—I know not if he ever alluded to it."

An inarticulate murmur answered him, the meaning of which he could not catch. He went on—

"The great crime which he had committed—I suppose you know that I extorted from him a promise that he would relinquish that which he had no right to call his own?"

"Yes—I know."

"That which was not his, his child cannot inherit."

There was a lengthened pause after he uttered these words. Lucille looked steadily at him, and he returned the gaze by a glance in which many feelings were clearly indicated—chiefly pity, warning, and the firm determination to do what he considered his duty.

"His child?" she repeated, at length, in a hollow voice. "How do you know that he left a child?"

"Madam—my poor child, do not attempt concealment with me. Be fair and candid with me; my most earnest desire, next to seeing that law and justice be maintained, is to spare you pain. I have known your every movement since you quitted Paris. You came here, having engaged two servants on the road; your child—your little Marie—was born here on the fifteenth of July. Since then, you have gone on from day to day, residing here under an assumed name. Confide in me, my dear child. I will try to counsel you to the very best of my ability. I am an old man, and you have evidently no one to

ask guidance from." He took one of her hands between his own; she did not withdraw it, but her head sank on her breast, and tears ran down her wan cheeks.

"Let us distinctly understand each other. You know that my son's child cannot inherit that which was not his. It would be to perpetuate the fraud of which he was guilty."

"I know it," said Lucille, without looking up.

"Then what I want to know is—what you mean to do with regard to—how can you arrange so that your child may not be defrauded of her real, undoubted rights, and yet——"

"And yet shield her from the disgrace entailed upon her by her father's crimes?"

It was Mr. Wynstyn's turn to shrink.

"I have already arranged in my own mind the course I purpose following."

"And that——?"

"If"—she hesitated for several minutes, then continued slowly—"my child cannot—must not claim—in fact I, and you, agree in the utter impossibility of that—"

"Go on."

"Yet, if it is ever known that he did leave a child, the dreadful story must—be revealed. We must tell her, when she is old enough, the reason of the concealment which I contemplate, a concealment which is imperatively necessary. If it is known that I have a child, what possible reason could I allege against her taking what would seem to be hers of right?"

"Well? I do not clearly comprehend what you mean."

"I must never acknowledge my child. I must keep it entirely hidden from the world."

He started back, and turned pale.

"But," he cried, "it would be heaping crime upon crime, robbing a child of its just inheritance! Not acknowledge your child?"

"No. I shall never acknowledge her until she is of an age to understand what I shall reveal, and she is able to judge for herself. I shall, when she is able to appreciate the difference between right and wrong, place before her my reasons for having acted as I—as I am going to act, and then leave her to choose her own course."

Mr. Wynstyn was so confounded that he could not speak.

"I shall then say, 'Judge, my child, whether it is preferable to proclaim a father's guilt and shame before the world—branding your own name with a double dishonour,—brand the name of a father who died a cruel death before you were born, and lose the bauble of an empty title ; or, to live for ever in obscure tranquility, on such property as I have been able to accumulate during your childhood and youth, obtaining a stainless name for yourself.' "

"Your proposition frightens me. It is the project of a maniac ! I dare not entertain it. It is another crime ! "

"It is only to keep the child in ignorance until she is capable of understanding and weighing the question. In any case she cannot inherit what—her father—gained by—by fraud."

"But it is frightful to contemplate committing another crime even to shield the memory of that father."

"It will not be a crime—she will be well provided for. I shall live in complete retirement, and lay aside the greater part of my yearly income to form a suitable fortune for her."

"You contemplate a crime towards the noble house to which you belong. It is not as if the line were certain to end with your daughter." Lucille did not answer. "Supposing you die before your child has attained the age which you have fixed for revealing the situation in which you have been placed?" Lucille was still silent. "What then? I can never agree to enter into such a scheme at all; and twenty years hence, I shall in all probability be dead."

"Then you would brand him even in his grave?" said Lucille, with a painful effort. "Brand the child even in her cradle?"

"Truth and justice are the greatest of God's laws."

"You would affix the stain of infamy to the brow of his innocent child?"

"It is useless to hope for escape from the invincible law which declares that the children must suffer for the sins of their fathers. Once enter upon the path of falsehood, and you are led you know not whither, while the truth can never injure you."

"Shall you offer any absolute hindrance to my plans?"

"I—I don't know—I am so startled by your proposition."

"Then," said Lucille, calmly, "what other course do you suggest? I have been meditating upon this for months, and I see no other path open to me. Why should my child be dragged into the glare of infamy, as the daughter of a criminal? What good purpose would be served by it?"

"I can only say that it is wrong to do an evil action that good may come of it. Right is right."

"Then what do you suggest?—what different course can you point out?" There was almost a defiant tone in her voice as she repeated this question.

"I cannot tell. It is a dreadful case upon which to be called to adjudicate."

"Unless you can show me a better course of action, I shall be obliged to follow my own plans," said Lucille, with the same outward tranquility. "You never can conceive the anguish of mind through which I have passed before I could resolve on sacrificing my child—sacrificing, I say, although I regard it as saving her. Yes, the child must suffer for

the sins of the father, in one way if not in another."

A prolonged silence fell upon them. Lucille waited for his next words, while Mr. Wynstyn continued to ponder, with knitted brows, on the extraordinary plan which she had resolved upon pursuing. Regard it from whatsoever point of view he might, it was equally repugnant to him, and he reproached himself for debating the subject at all. Right was right, he said, in his plain way, yet it did seem cruel to brand an innocent child unnecessarily, and drag back the memory of his dead son, to cover it with shame. His own feelings and wishes he heroically put aside. Had he considered himself alone, he would have gladly seized upon the chance of escape from shame which Lucille's proposed plan afforded. It seemed much better that the child should live in honourable obscurity, especially as she would be well provided for, not only by the forethought of her mother, but by the handsome fortune which he would leave. But then, another dishonesty would be perpetrated—suppose she married when of due age, and had children? It was not only possible, but probable.

Lucille watched his face anxiously, as he meditated.

"Then, granting that your scheme might be feasible," he said, at length, "suppose she is grown up, and suppose some honourable man offers her his hand, and suppose she returns the affection of such a man—I suppose, in——"

"When she is of age, she shall know everything; but if such a contingency should occur before she attains her majority, I shall certainly reveal everything to him, and let him judge for himself."

"And then, if she should have children—you have no right to rob them of their noble inheritance?"

"Would it repay them for having their name tarnished?"

"Right is right, and no process of sophistry can render wrong anything but wrong. Once you lose sight of the standard, you may fall into deadly peril."

Mr. Wynstyn again relapsed into a reverie.

"And in the mean time, whose child is she presumed to be?"

"At present, she is known to be my

daughter," answered Lucille, with a vivid blush. "But when I quit this neighbourhood, as I intend doing within the next few months——"

"Then?"

"I will—I intend that she shall be regarded simply as my niece. I love her better than myself, and I give up everything for her sake."

"Oh, it will never do," ejaculated Mr. Wynstyn. "Never—never—it is impossible—it is wicked."

"Well, what do you suggest?" again asked Lucille, with what seemed almost a remorseless coldness.

"I can suggest nothing."

"Will you do anything to oppose my plan?"

"I cannot answer you now. Will you allow me to see you at your house? I shall stay here—I have not resolved on the length of my stay, but if you will permit me, I shall be very glad to visit you at your house."

Lucille hesitated, but after a slight pause, she gave him permission to come to the house where she was living. Each had dreaded the interview so much, and had anticipated such

laceration of feeling, that it was a positive relief to find that it had passed with comparatively little pain. When Lucille rose, Mr. Wynstyn requested to be permitted to attend her home, to which she agreed. They walked slowly back, falling into commonplaces about the scenery, the weather, the roads, the lakes, the inns, anything, carefully abstaining from the slightest approach to the subject which had brought them together. On arriving at her home, Lucille asked Mr. Wynstyn to take his luncheon with her, pressing the invitation so warmly that he accepted it.

CHAPTER V.

THE ETERNAL LAW OF JUSTICE.

THE following morning, as Mr. Wynstyn was crossing the road to call upon Lucille, he met her as before, going out for a walk, again alone. The thoughts conjured up by yesterday's scene were too bitter to be encountered. Lucille was turning in the reverse direction, and, with a kindly salutation, Mr. Wynstyn accompanied her. The more Mr. Wynstyn saw of the young widow of his son, the more she interested and attracted him. She, on her side, felt irresistibly drawn to him. Mr. Wynstyn offered his arm. She took it, without speaking, and they walked on for some little way in silence.

"You look pale," he said, at length.

"I have passed through a very restless

night. Such little sleep as I did obtain was broken and disturbed. My head aches and throbs now."

"Then I suppose this will be no time for recurring to——"

"Oh yes," she hastily interrupted. "The sooner my mind is set at rest on the subject, the better for me."

He did not answer immediately, but continued walking until they came to the summit of a long flight of steps, cut into the sloping side of the road, leading down to the lake, where he suggested that they should sit down, as there was no other resting place within sight.

"Then, if you will let us again return to the subject of our yesterday's conversation," he said, when they had chosen their seats, he on the steps, she on the mossy ground on the level of the road,—*"I think,"* he continued, after a pause, *"that you look at this matter from a morbid point of view. As for your plan, that will be impossible. In fact, although so far from wishing to place myself in antagonism towards you, I desire nothing so much as your peace, yet I am bound to render it impossible, if you*

persist in following so foolish, nay, pardon for me saying, so unnatural a scheme."

Her frightened glance did not hinder him from going on.

"Once begin with falsehood, and you never know where you may be led. I am not going to moralize, but I must say that I have never known truth, however hard, however bitter, injure any one; whereas—you and I are living witnesses—that lying and deceit entail consequences sometimes too dreadful to bear speaking of. Now you must regard your situation fully, not try to shrink from it. Your child will be more safe if you tell the truth than if you seek—vainly, it will be—to hide her from the world, and the world from her."

"I am listening," said Lucille, as he stopped.

"You see, according to your absurd idea—pardon me, I am an old man unaccustomed to the society of ladies, and I use, perhaps, rough language—according to your intention of concealing her, until she is of an age to comprehend and judge for herself, you place her in a most anomalous position. You injure her in many ways, you run the risk of failing to gain her filial affection."

A cry from Lucille interrupted him.

"How so—what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. You will find that if she is not accustomed from her infancy to regard you as her mother, that she will fail to give you that spontaneous affection which children give to their mothers. Accustom your daughter to regard you as a comparatively distant relative or a friend, and she will dream and pine for the mother whom she fancies she has lost, whom she will imagine she has never seen."

Lucille buried her face in her hands for a moment, then threw back her head. "Never! She will love me in any case—I know she will."

"Well, let that pass. I do not want to argue the point. After all, you must necessarily condemn her to almost unbroken solitude; for how are you to answer the inquiries of those who might ask you questions regarding her parentage? Now, how do you mean to answer the child's own questions when she asks for her father, her mother? You know, she will not be an automaton, to come here, go there, sit still, talk or be

silent, think or not think, just as she is bid. She will think, she will ask; she must necessarily have a mind, a will of her own; and even were you to tell her a falsehood—which I will not imagine, even as a possibility—she would discover from others that she had been deceived by you.”

A long silence followed these remarks.

“Yes,” said Lucille, at length, lifting her head wearily, “I see my folly in thinking for an instant such a plan could be possible. I am punished for my contemplated deceit by what I suffer at this moment.”

“My dear child, you must forgive me if I make you suffer. You will believe me when I say that were it not for the consequences which must ensue if I did not do what I consider to be my duty, I should be the last person in the world to cross you in any way? I am sincerely relieved to find that you begin to waver in your determination. It would be impossible—simply impossible—to carry it out. Why, viewing this situation even apart from the interests of your child, how can you avoid exciting suspicion by the manner in which you must deal with the estates of—the—— It is

certain that you cannot take one farthing from the yearly revenues—to take a shilling would be a—robbery. Yet, if you decline to draw your portion—as, indeed, you have done, for some months,—or to interfere in any way with the yearly income or the management of the estates, you excite the most lively suspicion and curiosity—feelings which, being aroused, lead to investigations.”

“My God, my Father, help me!” murmured Lucille, her head falling between her hands.

“Heaven helps those who help themselves,” said Mr. Wynstyn, in a tone which sounded a little hard, although he did not mean to be severe.

“What would you have me do?” she tremulously asked.

“You must formally give up all claim on the property nominally left by—by my son, your husband.”

“I will do whatever you wish me to do.”

“You considerably over-rate the consequences of this simple act of honesty. Mark me, I suffer as much—nearly as much—as you do. I am not coldly urging you to perform a deed, the difficulties and dangers

of which I do not fully realize. I can fully appreciate your feelings, for they are my own. For years— But that is beside the question : I do not come to talk of my griefs, but of yours. You over-rate the consequences to your child, of whom you naturally think far more than of yourself. Even for yourself, why should you so dread the revelation when concealment will be inevitably nearly as bad ? Your woman's heart impels you to fly the world—to fear its frown—to shrink from the cold disdain with which you fancy this imaginary world will regard your child. Come, look at the question fairly, look firmly at these shadows. What will be the result—how will you be situated when this revelation which I urge upon you is made ? An interview with some lawyers, a mysterious paragraph in one of the fashionable morning papers, a few verbal alterations in Lodge and Debrett, one or two languid, gossiping, surmises in one or two drawing-rooms,—well, that is all. If you moved in this fashionable orbit, if you were a *femme du monde*, if you had even an ordinary circle of noble and distinguished friends and acquaintances whose opinion you feared——”

"You need not continue—you have conquered me."

"You expose your child to a thousand unforeseen evils by surrounding her with an atmosphere of untruth; whereas, by simply beginning with the truth, you know the dangers against which you will be obliged to guard, and can provide against them. You do not look for a brilliant destiny for her——"

"Oh, no. I only desire that she may have peace."

"Therefore, she need never enter the great world, where her father's sins would be visited upon her head."

"And yet, if she succeeds me, there are certain duties attached to her rank, which she must fulfil. She cannot be an absentee from her home——"

"What are *you*?" bluntly asked Mr. Wynstyn. "In what way do you perform any of these duties?"

Lucille hung her head, a vivid blush overspreading her face.

"And what have duties to do with the world?"

She did not answer. Mr. Wynstyn looked across the lake, apparently lost in reflection, while he unconsciously pulled to pieces a handful of dry leaves which had fallen from the trees under which they sat. Lucille took this opportunity of observing the old man more narrowly than she had as yet been able to do. The more she became familiarized with his features, the more strongly grew the strange sensation of protection, of confidence. The feeling that she had at length found a friend in whom she could place perfect reliance, was new and very sweet. She noted the calm, handsome profile, full of kindness and yet firmness; the well-set head; the tranquil eyes, which betrayed the presence of heart sorrow; the well-developed form, still unbent by age. A queer, childish idea came into her mind as she sat there, silent and sad. The October day was lovely, in spite of the great heat; and, looking at the delicious blue unclouded sky, the exquisite scenery about her—the distant purple hills and mountains speckled with white villas, scattered half embowered amid vineyards and gardens, backed by the richly tinted foliage of walnut, fig, and

chestnut trees ; the lake, bordered by creeping mosses and clambering weeds,—hearing the incessant warbling of the birds, feeling the scented breeze floating past her, for a few moments she wished that some beneficent fairy would grant that she might thus remain for a hundred years—without moving, perpetually enjoying this inexplicable, novel immunity from the cares of the world. For by some mysterious reaction, all her fears, her griefs, seemed to melt away ; how, why, or wherefore, she could not tell.

“Truth is always best,” she said, very softly. “I will do whatever you wish me to do. Whatever you think fit, I shall not contravene. Tell me what you would do.”

Mr. Wynstyn started.

“Believe me, this decision will be the best you could have arrived at ; the very best for your future peace and that of your child. I shall write to the lawyers in whose hands the business of the Jervoise estates is placed, and reveal to them—this most painful secret.”

The dreadful feeling of terror rushed back on Lucille : an iron grip seemed to compress her heart, and she grew perfectly pale ; the

earth faded before her eyes; she looked so ghastly that Mr. Wynstyn, in alarm, seized her wrist. The action arrested her fleeting senses.

"Yes, yes, yes," she cried; "do as you will. You know better than I—you are wiser than I am. Yet—will you—tell me what will happen when you have written?"

"Assuredly we must meet the lawyers. You and I must substantiate what will be a most strange story."

"Will you—will you give me a respite—a month or six weeks?" implored Lucille. "I am not strong—I——"

"Will you promise me that, if well, you will go to London at the end of two months?"

"I will."

"Let the matter rest till then."

"Thank you, thank you," answered Lucille, in the same hurried way as she had previously spoken.

CHAPTER VI.

MESSRS. RASHLEIGH AND PONSONBY, SOLICITORS,
BASINGHALL STREET, CITY.

MR. WYNSTYN lingered at Lugano for a month after this. He did not allow a day to pass without paying a visit to his daughter-in-law, in whom he grew more and more interested. He attended her in her walks ; he endeavoured, as far as possible, to withdraw her thoughts from herself and her miserable situation ; and, by degrees, he succeeded in clearing her mind of the morbid fears to which it had become a prey. At the end of four weeks he returned to England for a short time, for he wished to avoid exciting any suspicion of mystery regarding his movements. At the expiration of, perhaps, a fortnight, he came again to Lugano.

Lucille began to look on him as almost her

own father. She welcomed him as such on his return. The stipulated time having elapsed, Mr. Wynstyn told Lucille he was about to write to Messrs. Rashleigh and Ponsonby, the lawyers to the estate of the late Sir Thomas Jervoise.

"I am ready to do whatever you wish," was all Lucille's answer.

"You must be prepared to go to England immediately on the receipt of the reply to my letter."

Lucille raised no objection. She gladly, indeed, left the matter in the hands of one whom she felt was so much stronger than she was herself.

The telegraphic wires flashed back an answer to Mr. Wynstyn's letter. The hasty message was followed by a letter, expressive of the utmost (legal and cautious) surprise and horror. This was again succeeded by the appearance of Mr. Danvers, the managing clerk of the firm of Rashleigh and Ponsonby.

Mr. Wynstyn showed to Lucille the telegram and the letter. As he had scarcely done more than mention her name in his own letter, he resolved to spare her the pain of

an interview with Mr. Danvers, whose visit, moreover, was specially intended for himself. Mr. Danvers was a cool man of business. The firm of Rashleigh and Ponsonby took very little interest in the affairs of the Jervoise estate, for they were merely the nominal legal advisers of the family ; in addition to which, they looked upon all their clients with as scant concern as if they had in reality been simply skins of parchment and skeins of red tape. The firm, however, was for once startled from its ordinary imperturbability by the extraordinary revelation which had been made to it. The house was one of the oldest in the profession, and this was an exceedingly awkward affair.

Mr. Danvers, of the City, at his office, or engaged in business of any kind, was a totally different being from Mr. Danvers viewed simply in his domestic character. In business hours Mr. Danvers was as sharp as a needle ; nothing escaped him ; he was alert, never in a hurry, never losing a minute, the terror of the subordinate clerks, trusted implicitly by his employers, perfectly capable of understanding any legal subject, however abstruse,

equally capable of answering the simultaneous questions of an entire office-full of antagonistic trustees or executors, without confusing either questions or answers. After business, Mr. Danvers seemed to throw off his office character as he threw off his office coat. He was given to pottering, whether over a bookstall, a florist's window, or in his own neat garden at Peckham. He was likewise addicted to mild and harmless hobbies; and when he went to Ramsgate for his annual month's holiday at the end of the summer, he subsided almost into good-natured imbecility. Every evening, on his way home from the City, he bought shrimps, or some new-fangled shell-fish paste, or a geranium, or, sometimes, on very rare occasions, a bag of cherries, which were, as a matter of course, hailed with exclamations of delight and astonishment by his wife and the six children, uttered always in precisely the same tone at precisely the same moment of his advent. Mr. Danvers hated going on the Continent on business matters, especially as he "didn't speak the language." But business was business, and so he invariably went without a murmur.

The interview between Mr. Danvers and Mr. Wynstyn was brief, and entirely to the point. It was arranged that, as soon as possible, Mr. Wynstyn, with the baroness, and the lawyers of the different parties concerned in this most unfortunate affair, should meet at the offices of Messrs. Rashleigh and Ponsonby in Basinghall Street. Mr. Wynstyn communicated this result to Lucille. She quietly agreed to go. In effect, within a week, they were on their way to England. Lucille gave up her apartments at Lugano, and took her child and the nurse, and her own maid, dismissing her man-servant. The ensuing days passed in a species of whirl for Lucille. She had the advantage of a week's rest, on reaching London, before she was obliged to go to Basinghall Street.

The morning she so dreaded arrived only too quickly—a bright, cheery, sunshiny January morning. When Lucille awakened, she heard the sparrows chirping and twittering outside on the eaves. She essayed to collect all her strength and firmness. She remained in her own room with her child until half-past two in the afternoon, and then descended to

the apartment where Mr. Wynstyn was waiting for her. He started when he saw her. She was perfectly pale; even from her eyes the colour seemed to have faded.

"You are ill?" cried Mr. Wynstyn, touching her hands. They were dry—burning.

"No—I am not ill," she answered, very quietly. "I am quite ready to go."

He looked anxiously at her, and then led her down to the cab which was in waiting. She never uttered a syllable during that drive. When they stopped in front of the offices of Messrs. Rashleigh and Ponsonby, she was painfully calm, but every sense was strained to the utmost tension. Every little trifling object or incident she noted with that keenness of observation which is one of the effects of extreme agitation. They were unable to approach the steps for a few minutes because a waggon happened to stand in the way, and she stared intently at the vehicle, and caught herself beginning to count the sacks which filled it, and wondered what they contained. Years after, she remembered the name and address on the side of the waggon. When they alighted, she stood for a minute or

two in the square entrance hall, while Mr. Wynstyn was speaking to the cabman, and looked mechanically through a glass door, at a middle-aged man lifting about little packets of paper, from shelf to table, and from table to shelf, like a nineteenth century Ixion.

“What a way of spending life!” she thought. . “Never to do anything but shift those parcels from one side of a room to another.”

Mr. Wynstyn gave her his arm, and led her up to the first floor. They stood for a moment irresolute in the long corridor running partly across the top of the broad staircase, for Mr. Wynstyn was uncertain to which end to go, and was about to approach a room the door of which was wide open, when the door of the apartment at the other end opened, and Mr. Danvers came out.

With a word or two of salutation, he ushered them into the room he had just quitted. It was vacant, and Lucille sat down near the fire, still in the same mechanical manner, upon one of the hard, dark green leather chairs. Mr. Danvers left them, and Mr. Wynstyn was trying to arouse the attention

of his companion, when the door opened, and Mr. Danvers returned with some one, whom he introduced as Mr. Rashleigh.

This gentleman was a very tall, large, muscular-looking man, of perhaps fifty years of age. He was one of those who at first sight inspire men with respect and confidence, and women with interest and curiosity. He was one of those exceptional men who seem exactly in their right place. He gave one the idea of a person who had, at the outset of his career, fixed a point to which he desired to attain, and having gained that height, felt completely satisfied with his success. No one ever possessed a more wonderful combination of qualities fitting him to fill his place. His manner was perfect, yet it would have been difficult to find a suitable epithet in describing it. He never used two words when one sufficed to explain his meaning, but there was a suave grace about him which alike influenced all his clients, be they rich young widows, irascible litigants, timid elderly orphaned spinsters dissatisfied with trustees, cool business men, or others.

Mr. Rashleigh was exceedingly annoyed by

the affair which had caused the meeting of to-day, but he did not evidence the slightest emotion. On the contrary, he seemed to think that it was absolutely necessary, for many reasons, to take the plainest, most business-like view of the matter.

"I am afraid," said Mr. Wynstyn, a few ordinary civilities having passed, "we have come before our time?"

"About ten minutes or so. I am glad you have come before the others, because, if Lady Deveril will permit, I should be pleased to have a word or two with you."

He left the room, accompanied by Mr. Wynstyn, leaving Lucille alone, with her assent.

She was not conscious of taking any survey of that terrible room, yet years afterwards she could have minutely described the furniture and arrangements of the office. It was a moderately sized chamber, long for its breadth, carpeted, but curtainless. The two windows—the panes obscured with the dirt which had been accumulating, probably, since the house was first used as a place of business—appeared to overlook some narrow yard, or warehouses.

An office-table, heaped with papers, letters, parchments, pens, books, envelopes, and all kinds of legal litter, was at one end of the room, just under one of the windows. At the opposite end of the room, against the wall, and lighted by the second window, facing the door, was another table, also littered, but apparently used for spreading out leases, deeds, settlements, wills, and such things. On a line with the door was an immense glass case, filled with books, papers, and deeds; beside this, was a large, bright green iron safe, and opposite was the fire-place, the chimney-piece loaded with papers, books, and oblong, lacquered boxes. The only comfortable seat in the room was one beside the principal table—a large arm-chair; the other chairs were hard and stiff to look at, with dark, glossy green leather seats and backs, Mr. Rashleigh's own chair being made of mahogany and cane, and decidedly the most uninviting in the room. Behind the square table were half a dozen shelves, placed against the wall, and filled with boxes, papers, deeds, books; and Lucille was roused from a profound reverie by finding that her eyes were

fixed on a dark green tin box, lettered, in large white characters, with the words, "The Exors. of Wm. Jackson." She was sedulously counting the letters of these words, backwards and forwards, without in the least knowing what she was about, or attaching the slightest meaning to them, until she was startled into consciousness. She turned aside, and mechanically picking up a number of the *Law Times* that lay on the top of a pile of papers upon a chair near her, began to read. She had read carefully down the first column, consisting of legal advertisements, without having understood a sentence of what her eyes rested upon, when a tap at the door made her start and tremble, and then some one came in. It was Mr. Grant, the lawyer to her own estate.

Mr. Rashleigh had led Mr. Wynstyn into the room at the opposite end of the corridor, which was the office where his clerks worked. As he explained, he had so arranged that they were all out in different directions, engaged in such matters that they could not be back in less than an hour. This office was a room of the same proportions as Mr. Rashleigh's

private office, but lighter, having three large windows which extended almost across the side opposite to the door. It was uncarpeted, and one cane-bottomed chair, with the high-railed desks and hard perches of the clerks, with a glass case running along the side of the wall opposite to the windows, a second glass case against the wall facing the fireplace, a small clock hung near the ceiling above the chimney-piece, and an iron fender, constituted the entire furniture. Mr. Rashleigh closed the door, and signed to his visitor to sit down, remaining himself standing, with his elbow supported on the empty chimney-piece.

"I shall not detain you more than a few minutes," he said. "I have something to say which I could not possibly mention in presence of Lady Deveril. It is imperative, as you must see, that, even at the risk of wounding your feelings, I must speak plainly."

"Certainly, certainly. I desire, for my part, that everything shall be as clear and straightforward as can be."

"I can well appreciate and sympathize with your most unhappy position, assuming, as I

do, that what you have stated in your letter addressed to us is correct. It is only, however, as a matter of urgent necessity, and with very great reluctance, and as a point of professional duty, that I venture on what I am about to say."

This hesitation was most unusual with Mr. Rashleigh, of which Mr. Wynstyn was unaware, although he saw that he was, as he said, only urged by absolute necessity to say whatever he was about to say.

"I can assure you," said Mr. Wynstyn, finding that he was pausing from repugnance to speak in plain terms—"I assure you most solemnly, that my only wish—my most earnest desire and prayer is, that justice may be done. I have weighed this matter well; whatever you can say, will not hurt my feelings. I have considered and reconsidered this most unhappy affair too often to suffer from even the most condemnatory opinions of others."

"I am not about to refer to what has passed. I believe in what you say, and I believe that you sincerely wish to see justice done, and I do not imagine that you would join in any conspiracy to shield an evil-doer. What I

wished to say was this: Do you think it possible that Sir—that the man calling himself Sir Thomas Jervoise, did *not* go down in the *Esmeralda*?”

Mr. Wynstyn started back, and his face became ashy pale—the colour faded even from his lips. He was seized with a kind of vertigo for a moment, and looked blankly into the face of Mr. Rashleigh.

“I have no reason whatever to believe that such might be the case,” resumed the lawyer, after a moment’s pause. “The idea occurred to me, when I received your letter, that perhaps—you see I am obliged to speak plainly, and while I find a difficulty in being thus plain with you, I could not even hint my (I hope unfounded) suspicion to any other person—on receiving your letter, I thought, might he not have taken advantage of the circumstance of the wreck to avoid the dangers which he felt hung over him, as his crime had been discovered?”

“It is impossible,” muttered Mr. Wynstyn. “Impossible,” he repeated, more firmly. “At the time, my lawyer, Mr. Branston, made the most minute and searching inquiries; for I will

confess to you that when I first learnt the intelligence, the suspicion which you now mention as having occurred to you, darted into my mind, and I could not rest satisfied until I had the most complete evidence. Not only my own lawyer, but the legal adviser of Lady Deveril collected every particular, lest there should be any mistake which might be fatal in a case like this ; and you, doubtless, satisfied yourself at the time with regard to the matter ? ”

“ True. We did so. I spoke of a passing thought, which I could not of course mention before Lady Deveril, and I thought it necessary to frankly name it to you.”

“ I can say nothing beyond reminding you that we shall have all the evidence drawn together on all sides laid before us to day.”

“ True—true.”

One of the clerks entered at this moment, and Mr. Rashleigh, quitting the room, led the way to his own office. As he opened the door, they heard Lady Deveril’s lawyer say—

“ It is a trite observation, madam, that lawyers are like father confessors ; anything confided to their keeping is as safe as if committed to the guardianship of the tomb.”

In a few minutes Mr. Wynstyn's lawyer arrived. Lucille was too much preoccupied with her painful thoughts to have leisure to reflect on the awkwardness of being the only lady in presence of so many gentlemen, and Mr. Rashleigh had had consideration so to place her that she sat as much as possible aloof from those who were presently engaged in the discussion, which commenced immediately after the appearance of Mr. Wynstyn's solicitor. Mr. Rashleigh said little, but he listened with the closest attention to what was uttered by others, and rigidly examined every paper, letter, or other document.

Lucille, when called upon, answered with outward calmness the questions addressed to her by Mr. Rashleigh. He was very considerate, although he could not avoid putting the most searching inquiries to her. He questioned Mr. Branston as minutely, and sent all the papers of importance into the next room, to be copied. The interview lasted for two or three hours. At its close, Mr. Grant and Mr. Branston left. Of course the affair rested now entirely in the hands of Messrs. Rashleigh and Ponsonby, and it was understood on

all sides that it was to be kept profoundly secret.

"I am completely satisfied," said Mr. Rashleigh, as he closed the door when the two gentlemen had quitted the room. "The evidence is perfect."

"And now," said Mr. Wynstyn, in a voice the hollowness of which startled himself, "what is to be done?"

"The rest will be very simple. Leave it in my hands. You must be prepared for another meeting, for you will probably be obliged to give your evidence again before the Solicitor-General. You may rely upon us for not letting the affair be known beyond the narrowest limits, for our own sake. Mr. Grant will carefully study the legal interests of the Baroness Deveril, I have no doubt."

The dreaded interview was over. Lucille quitted the room, clinging to the arm of Mr Wynstyn. Going downstairs, she was guided by him, half supporting herself against the oak balustrade, and Mr. Wynstyn had to lift her into the cab. She was as silent during the drive home as she had been coming. Mr. Wynstyn held her hand firmly clasped in his

all the way, but did not utter a word to disturb her as she lay back, her eyes half closed. He knew by his own feelings what hers must be. When they got to Morley's he was obliged to half carry her to her room.

In a few days, all was finally settled. Lucille had nothing more to fear, or to hope, she thought; nothing to live for, except the future of her child: a gloomy prospect for a beautiful woman only three or four and twenty years of age! Mr. Wynthyn urged her to go to Lyndon Holme, but to this suggestion she refused to accede, preferring to return to Lugano, where she wished to buy a little villa, and stay for three or four years, at least. In vain he represented to her the injury she would do to her tenants and her property by absenting herself; she was immovable. She begged that he would be with her as frequently as he could. This he promised, and accompanied her, as she was determined on going thither, to Lugano, and assisted her in making such arrangements as were needful for her comfort.

CHAPTER VII.

CIRCLING FATE.

AFTER the storm came a long interval of peace. Yet those months, which slowly drifted one after another, brought changes, each a step in the great march of life.

By degrees, it was tacitly agreed between Lucille and Mr. Wynstyn that they should occupy the position mutually of father and daughter, and every day their reciprocal affection grew more firmly fixed. This affection was, perhaps, all the more curious and beautiful as the one had never known the blessing of having a daughter, the other of having seen a father. He took and furnished for her one of the prettiest villas to be obtained in the neighbourhood of Lugano—a place to which the young widow had become much attached, although she had never visited

it before she fled thither in her grief. The house was charmingly situate, with a fine garden, and an uninterrupted view of the lake. Mr. Wynstyn took the greater part of the trouble upon himself of arranging the house and engaging the servants, but he so contrived that it should, for the time, form a kind of temporary hobby for Lucille. Nearly all her heart was given to her baby, the little Marie. All the deep passion of her soul, concentrated from want of suitable objects on whom to bestow it, went out in a great flood of love to this only child.

The first changes affected Lucille very slightly. The marriage of the two elder nieces of Mr. Wynstyn—the one to a wealthy farmer, the other to a well-to-do miller—these were happy events. But the next was a sad one. Mrs. Wynstyn was seized with a fatal illness, and after suffering greatly for a fortnight, died, leaving her youngest daughter, Barbara, solely to the care of Mr. Wynstyn.

These events broke up the circle at Pytchley Farm. Barbara was well provided for by her mother's will, and Mr. Wynstyn determined to make her his heiress, as her sisters wanted

nothing. He talked to her one evening, about a month after the death, and, without telling her of his intentions as regarded the disposition of his property, asked her if she should prefer to stay with him or accept the invitation of either of her sisters, who were equally anxious for her to reside with him. He explained how her mother had provided for her, thereby leaving her at liberty pecuniarily, and gave her perfect freedom to choose what course she liked best. She replied by placing both her hands in his, and begging to be allowed to remain with him always. He kissed her, and asked if she would object to go on the Continent with him for a time, chiefly with a view to finishing her education. She smiled, and said that wherever he went, she would gladly accompany him, if he would let her.

Barbara was his favourite, and he was determined to advance her as far as his means would admit. In his next letter to Lady Deveril, with whom he corresponded punctually every week, he entered at length into the subject now occupying all his thoughts, and created so much interest in her mind for

Barbara, whom she had known slightly during her stay in Derfordshire, that she spontaneously suggested what he had half doubted the propriety of proposing—that he should come and live at Lugano with her, and bring Barbara with him, as a member of the family. He told Barbara of this, and with her consent, wrote an eager acceptance of the plan. Then he carried her off to Lugano.

Lucille had resolved on casting away as much of her burden of care as she could, and being as cheerful for the sake of her child and its grandfather as the weight of the recollection of its father's guilt would permit. It required no effort to feel pleasure at the sight of Barbara's frank, fair face, and at the first meeting, the two young women were friends. Barbara was one of the few happy beings who win love and kindness by simply extending their hand. She would have made a pretty subordinate figure for any background, and always seemed in her right place wherever she was, attracting enough attention to make her feel that she was not neglected, without causing jealousy.

The faintest hint from Mr. Wynstyn was

sufficient to induce Lucille to devote herself to the further education of her new friend, and thereby obtain an additional interest in the daily routine of existence. Barbara had hitherto received only such training as a farmer's daughter of the better order receives, but she was naturally clever, and every month grew fonder of her beautiful instructress. Lucille was highly trained and gifted with special talents which had been fully cultivated, having, too, the rare capability of being able to impart the knowledge and accomplishments she possessed.

When Ettie last visited her in Paris, she had made her promise to write frequently; and from that time, chiefly from the persistence with which Ettie maintained the correspondence, they had exchanged letters about once in every two months. Ettie was constantly moving about from one place to another, her aunt having voluntarily accepted the sole charge of taking care of her. Her marriage had twice been unavoidably postponed: in the first instance, by the death of Lord Carluthen's mother. It was again arranged, when the death of his only sister

deferred it a second time. These events she communicated at great length to Lucille, and after a time, Lucille began to regard these letters as pleasures to look forward to.

Little Marie grew taller and prettier every day. When she was two years old, she was a lovely little creature. Words convey but a feeble idea of any kind of beauty, but the special loveliness of children, as that of perfume and flowers, defies description. Going on the "item, one pair of eyes, item, one nose" principle, she was a slender, lithe child, too thin, indeed, for her age, with legs and arms resembling carved ivory, and a shape eminently aristocratic. Her deep, dark, thoughtful eyes seemed to look out from a soul of profound mystery and beauty. She had the rare combination of a fair complexion and dark hair and eyes. Her face was like a delicately tinted shell, or the heart of a blush rose. In her looks, she did not plead for love, as some pretty, graceful children do—she was too queenly. She had not the childish way of either going up to strangers and saluting them with immediate confidence, or timidly shrinking; when she saw people for the first time,

she would behave with a grave courtesy, but regard them with a steady glance, as if she would judge whether they were worthy or not of her friendship. She was grave and dignified beyond her years; the want of playmates of her own age made her dangerously reflective. Like all children who live exclusively with their seniors, she continually asked the most unanswerable questions; she advanced the most startling queries; her mind seemed always on the alert. She would stand for half an hour in the same attitude, meditating, and would curiously recall some of those quaint child angels in the stained-glass windows of old churches, or the pictures of Raffaele and of Correggio. Neither her mother nor her grandfather ever realized the peril of leaving a sensitive child in such spiritual isolation. Marie was always well; her spirits were always equal, for she was naturally grave, and those great solemn eyes often smiled after their own fashion. She was a wonderfully lovable child, and capable of profound attachment. She cared for few, but her little circle of loves and likings absorbed her whole heart. Her mother, her "auntie," as she styled

Barbara, and her "Carissimo Favorito"—Mr. Wynstyn,—these she loved with a depth of affection unknown to any human being.

Much has been said and written by many people about a mother's love. Perhaps it is only one mother in a thousand who realizes what poets sing of maternal affection. It is doubtless as well that such should be the case. The very yearning in her heart for something near and dear to cling to, on which to lavish the passionate womanly fondness hitherto crushed back upon her, made Lucille love her little daughter with a love to which there is scarcely a comparison. She felt as if that tender life were bound about her own with such secure bonds that, one touched, the other must wither and die.

Marie was just three years old when Ettie wrote to tell Lucille that she was married. The letter showed that the writer was exceedingly pleased and happy, but there were scant signs of sentiment pervading it—none of the delicate aroma of bridal joy. In truth, she gave more of what was going on around her, and of what people said, and what they did, and what they wore, than of her own feelings,

hopes, or wishes. Six or seven months passed, and she was coming to visit Lugano, to see Lucille. The two friends had not met since that time in Paris when the heart of one had been filled with grief and horror. Lucille looked forward with undisguised interest to the promised visit, and when Ettie came, received her with such warmth, that the young wife was greatly touched.

Ettie was again changed when Lucille beheld her as the Marchioness of Carluthen—again, outwardly for the better. The little country girl who had cried over her rabbits and pet donkey had vanished for ever. Lady Carluthen reminded one of those piquant little marquises of the eighteenth century, whom we read about in the “memoirs” of Bachaumont and other old French gossips. Had not her toilet been originated in the most exquisite taste, she would have been dressed almost to the verge of fashion; but everything she wore was of perfect elegance, dainty, and exactly suitable to her. How different she was from the blushing child who had stammered that confession of love upon Lucille’s breast! There was an eager unrest about her,

yet she seemed to want nothing. What chiefly struck Lucille with a sense of something akin to fear was, that if she did not look back, neither did she look forward. Warned by former experience, Lucille was satisfied to float with the current of light talk in which Ettie indulged; but the most casual observation, guided by previous knowledge of Ettie's character, enabled her to see that the one deep wound had seared that young heart for ever. She loved no one—she liked Lucille, she seemed fond of her husband, but passion—fervour—was dead within her.

“We are going to stay in this neighbourhood for about six weeks,” said Ettie, in her off-hand style; “so you must give me a good deal of your society while I have the opportunity of enjoying it. When we leave this place, we return to England, and if you do not go there likewise, it is impossible to say when we may see each other again—not for ages, I suppose.”

“Let us make a bargain,” said Lucille, with a smile. “If I give you my company, you must freely reciprocate the kindness.”

“The compact is signed and sealed. By

the way, I am looking forward to seeing several people who are coming here for a few weeks, and I intend organizing some pleasant parties—water parties, and music parties, and various things of that kind: may I hope to be able to count on having you?"

Lucille looked grave immediately. "I never go anywhere," she said, her voice unconsciously softening into pathos, as she looked down at her black dress.

"You must come if I ask you. Don't shake your head. I want especially to introduce to you a charming friend of my husband—of mine, too, for he stands at the head of my list of favourites. You don't know him, for I asked him; and he told me he had heard of you, but had never seen you. His name is Vayning—Major Vayning, and he is perfectly charming, as you will say when you have seen him: just like one of those grand old knights, you know. He would be magnificent dressed in armour. I always think nice people ought to know one another."

Lucille looked grave, and let Ettie run on. Then she said, "How do you mean, he *heard* of me?"

"I don't know. Those are almost his exact words. I cannot translate them. I suppose he knew somebody who knew you."

Lucille said nothing more, but when Ettie renewed her request that she would promise to join her projected parties, she firmly persisted in declining. After that, not a day elapsed without an exchange of visits. Ettie took a fancy to Barbara, and patronized her until she nearly turned the head of the unsophisticated girl. With Mr. Wynstyn and Marie, she made little progress.

"Had she remained as she was five years ago," thought Lucille, "she and Marie would have been playing together like kittens, and she would have been the chief favourite of Marie's grandfather."

One afternoon, about a fortnight after Ettie's arrival, Lucille went to her house, accompanied by Barbara and Marie. Ettie was not yet visible, for she was dressing to go out riding, but Lucille and Barbara were requested to go into the drawing-room. A gentleman was already there, alone. He was standing at the chimney-piece, examining a beautiful, fragile lamp of painted china, when

the rustle of the ladies' dresses made him turn round. This gentleman was Major Vayning.

It was one of the minor embarrassing situations in life, for Lucille and Major Vayning had never previously met. Lucille, however, had a simple dignity which would have sufficed to carry her through greater difficulties than a momentary awkwardness about a point of etiquette; and Major Vayning never remained an instant in doubt as to what he should do.

When Ettie came down, she found Lucille listening attentively to an amusing account which Major Vayning was giving of the caves near Lugano, and a history of the bandits, who, it was thought, used to haunt them.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUN COW AT RICHMOND.

"It is a frightful bore," said Tom Wynstyn, as he leaned his elbows on the table in his shabby lodging at Kentish Town, for the purpose of taking a general view of his position—"a frightful bore. But everything is a bore, and I begin to wish I had gone down in that precious old steamer after all. To think that five years have gone by since that night! I shall be obliged to look up my ancient ally, Master Vayning, and talk to him. Truly sorry am I, my dear Ruth; but it is a case of urgent necessity when the reins are taken in hand by our distinguished friend who scents his handkerchief with sulphur, and bothers his bootmaker to such an extent. Five—six years, however, is a long time, so I must take care that everything is all right."

He rose with some weariness, and brushed

some specks of dust from his coat—a decidedly shabby garment ;—took up a felt hat, and his cane ; then whistled to his dog, Nip, who came bounding from his corner on the hard horse-hair sofa, where he had been lying asleep during his master's reverie. A few steps brought him to the main street, where he got into a yellow omnibus, in order to reach the river, where he embarked on board one of the steamers.

Arrived at Richmond, he seemed in no particular hurry. He dropped Nip, who began scampering round him, and running off at an inconceivable number of angles, apparently in every direction at once. The day was bright and fine, although the leaves were lying in heaps on the ground, rustling and flying under the footsteps of Tom and his canine friend. It was about three o'clock when Tom reached the village, and, as his business would soon be settled, he strolled along, enjoying the soft, balmy air, and the faint breeze, and the lovely landscape which lay in tranquil beauty—enjoying all these bounteous gifts idly, unthinkingly, as the idlest insect fluttering in the golden sunshine might have enjoyed them.

He continued to walk along by the edge of the river, amusing himself, it seemed, by watching the gay boats, of every imaginable size and style, which floated past or lay moored beside lawn slopes.

Tom walked on until he came to a large, handsome villa, the grounds of which extended down to the bank whereon he stood. He knew the house well, for he had had some trouble in finding it on a former occasion, when he had come down here on the same expedition which had brought him now. Jasmine Lodge was one of the best houses of its pretensions in Richmond, and was surrounded with fine old trees, growing in the grounds which environed the building. Jasmine Lodge was the residence of Theodore Vayning, Esquire, the great goldsmith at Cornhill.

"It is a nice place of its kind," said Tom, critically. Then, having taken a careless survey, he resumed his walk, followed by Nip. After a brief consideration, he left the river, going on until he got to the borders of some fields, through which a foot-path ran. The day was very silent; the birds were absolutely still; indeed, the solitude would have been

oppressive in its quietude, had it not been broken by an occasional barking from a distant dog, or the musical ring of a blacksmith's hammer. The sky was of an intensely deep blue, flecked by beautiful masses of snow-white cloud drifting in fantastic shapes. Presently, having crossed the fields, Tom found himself in a kind of open space, in front of a little way-side tavern—a quaint, old structure, with the sign of the Dun Cow, poultry and dogs running about, a waggon standing at the door, and a couple of carters sitting on a bench drinking some of the national beverage. A magnificent horse-chestnut, growing between the water-trough and the house, afforded a delicious shade. Tom had been here once before, when he had made the same cautious inquiries which he was about to make now. He was in doubt if the same garrulous old woman, who had been landlady then were still living; but he trusted she was, for she was free and unsuspecting in answering questions of any and every kind.

He looked through the open door before entering. A commonplace young woman was sitting in the bar, stitching, and he felt dis-

appointed, though still determined on satisfying his inquiries here. As he was standing with an irresolute step on the threshold, he glanced towards an open door, through which could be seen the garden at the back of the Dun Cow, and caught sight of the old landlady, who apparently crossed from the other side of the garden to pick beans, which she threw into a dish held by a young girl.

It was not at all likely that the old woman would remember him, a casual customer of one day, after the lapse of six or seven years, especially as he had not, on the only occasion when they had met, been in her house more than half an hour. Tom made up his mind to have his dinner here, so boldly walked in, followed by Nip, who was too well trained not to keep closely at his master's heels wherever he went, and to behave in such a manner as to attract no attention. He asked the young woman who was attending what he could have, and ultimately elected to dine off fried eggs and bacon—agreeing all the more readily as there was nothing else to be had. This brought the landlady in from the garden, as he anticipated.

“What a roundabout way of getting at a simple fact,” he thought, a slight, sneering smile passing over his lips.

He began to talk in a careless, off-hand way to the landlady, Mrs. Moore, who was a blithe, kind-hearted widow. He commenced by remarking on the fineness of the day, complaining, at the same time, that the sun was too hot, and that he felt very tired.

“Dear, dear, dear!” the old lady said; agreeing to everything he said, rather taken by his easy manner and his handsome face.

Then he let her talk; but finding she did not give him the information he wanted, he broke in upon her monologue unceremoniously, and told her that he had just returned from abroad, and had come to visit his beloved mother. “I was born here,” he said, “in this neighbourhood.”

“Dear, dear, now only to think of that!” said Mrs. Moore. “I should never have fancied it. You look quite forren-like.”

“Yes—” answered Tom Wynstyn, rather slowly. “I have been away a great many years. My mother lives at Wimbledon. Lives, I say; but I don’t know if she is really living, or——”

"Dear, dear! but that's sad," replied the old lady. "How does that happen? Haven't you written to her? I have a son out at the gold-fields, and he writes to me regular."

"I have not received any answer to my last two or three letters," said Tom, "chiefly, I suppose, because I have been travelling home, and I wrote to my mother to tell her not to send any more letters for the present, as I had no settled place of abode."

"And when might you have heard from her last?" asked Mrs. Moore, who was now laying the table-cloth.

"Why—perhaps a month ago."

"And you are now going to see her? Dear, dear! I hope she is well and hearty."

Then, after a little desultory talk of this kind, he began to skim round more and more closely to his object.

"When I was younger—some years since—before I left this place," he resumed, affecting to follow idly Mrs. Moore's actions, as she arranged on the table the knives, forks, and glasses, "I used to know several people about here who were very kind to me. Of one, especially, I should be glad to learn some

news, for I do not know for certain whether he is living or dead."

"And who might that be, sir?"

"A gentleman named Vayning—Mr. Theodore Vayning, who used to live at the house called Jasmine Lodge."

"Dear heart! I can tell you whatever you want to know about him. Why, he was my old master, before I and my husband—poor dear man—left him, and set up here. My husband was gardener——" And she ran on with the account which Tom had already heard from her on his former visit. He did not interrupt her, but waited patiently, feeling assured she would give him his desired information, without the trouble of asking for it. She, in fact, went on talking so long, that he had half finished his dinner before she paused.

"And he is well and hearty now?" said he, quietly.

"Ay, and likely to be, sir, I am glad and happy to say. I saw the dear old gentleman this very morning, looking as young as could be. I forgot to tell you that his nephew, Mr. Rutherford, is going to live with him."

"Indeed. I never knew him. What sort of person is he?"

An expressive shrug answered the query. He judiciously put an inquiry which set her off again. "The way he has come is this—he has been a widower for years, and of late his daughters have all got married except one, and she was dying, the doctors said—poor young thing!—and her brother, a nice gentleman he is, I hear, though I've never seen him—he is in the army—he came home, and took her away, to live somewhere in Italy, or Germany, or Prussia, I don't know where exactly, for the good of her health. I hear he has taken a beautiful house—the major, I mean—on the Continent."

Tom had obtained his information, that old Vayning was living and well; yet he had a wish to learn as much as he could about Rutherford Vayning's private affairs; not that he cared much, but he did not know how the information might be useful to him.

"So Mr. Rutherford, feeling lonely, I suppose, has come to stay with his uncle, the old gentleman; and he lives there now, and has given up his house in Brighton, where he used

to live. It must be dull enough for the poor old gentleman now ; for Mr. Rutherford never was very good company, I can tell you, and of course the young ladies, now they are married, never come ; and it is only once in a way the major ever comes, because of his sister, though they do say the poor dear thing is getting better—Miss Margaret, I mean. And the major never did come much, for he has been nearly always away in India and places.”

The old landlady had been chattering in this fashion during her guest's dinner, but a sudden inroad of customers obliged her to leave him for some little time. She was so pleased with him, however, that she returned when she had some leisure, decidedly to his annoyance ; for he was rather tired of her garrulity, now that he had obtained the information he had come to seek. He could not go, desiring above all things to avoid drawing attention to his proceedings.

“I suppose you have other friends about here?” she said, bustling in, and pretending to be engaged in various little ways about the room, having no further excuse for troubling herself regarding his dinner, for he had

finished, and was merely drinking some of the fine old ale, which had been brought by the servant.

"Y—yes—I used to know a great many people in this neighbourhood," he replied.

"Did you know the Jamesons, and the Wardens, and Mr. Minard, and old Mrs. Sowerby, or——" She ran over a long list of names, some of which, as he caught them, he repeated, as those of his former friends, and pretended to listen with interest to detailed accounts of what they were doing, if living, or lengthened dissertations on their last moments if they were dead. At length he seized a favourable moment, when she had talked herself out of breath, and rose to go.

"Well," he said, "I must be on the tramp. I——"

Mrs. Moore poured out a profusion of good wishes, trusting he would find his mother in health, and gave him every kind farewell. The dear old body had seldom seen any one who had so completely taken her heart, and she followed him to the door, to look after him as he walked rapidly away ; his dog, which he had refreshed with a dish composed partly

from his own dinner, and partly from the larder of the bustling old landlady, trotting after him.

"What a dear, good gentleman he is!" sighed Mrs. Moore. "How glad his mother will be to have him home again! I hope he will find her well. Ah, how pleased I should be to see my dear boy."

"What a frightful old bore!" muttered Tom Wynstyn, as he walked away in the soft, slanting sunlight. "My ears feel as if they had been torn out by the roots. What a dinning and ringing! I suppose she either grows worse as she grows older, or I am less impervious to bores than I used to be in the days of my youth. Good heavens! how glad I am to get out of her way! To-morrow I shall visit my excellent friend, Ruth. The old boy will be rather surprised to behold his ancient ally, I fancy—a case of 'more free than welcome.' It is odd to think how the world has changed since I and he last met."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE LIBRARY AT JASMINE LODGE.

EARLY rising was not one of Tom Wynstyn's distinguishing peculiarities. It was nearly twelve o'clock before he had finished his breakfast the next morning after his visit to Richmond, and close on one before he finally emerged into the street on his way to Cornhill, leaving his dog cowering with disappointment in a corner of the sofa.

"Old Rutherford Vayning will be more astonished than pleased, I prognosticate," he muttered, as he climbed on to the knife-board of a yellow omnibus.

He marched into the shop with a good deal of his old audacity, although he was so indifferently, not to say shabbily, dressed, having been obliged to part with the best articles in

his wardrobe, that he looked far from being a desirable loungee in a jeweller's or goldsmith's establishment. He asked one of the young men, carelessly, if he could see Mr. Vayning. The young man looked at him.

"No, sir, he is not in town."

Tom Wynstyn looked at him in return with an almost blank aspect.

"Not in town? When—why—I want to see him."

"He won't be in town this week, I believe," replied the shopman.

"Indeed: may I ask——"

"I am not at liberty to answer any questions, sir. If you leave any message it shall be forwarded to Mr. Vayning," responded the other coldly. "Perhaps you might like to see Mr. Bardon, the manager?"

Tom Wynstyn for a moment lost his ordinary presence of mind, and stammered out something. Why he was so confounded he did not himself know.

"Have you any idea of what day he will be here?" he asked.

"Sir, if you have any particular message for him, I will take care it is forwarded to him."

"You do not know when he will be here?"

"Perhaps next week. Well, I believe I may say that he will be here this day week."

Finding he could gain no satisfactory information from this young fellow, Tom Wynstyn turned on his heel, declining to leave any message, and walked out into the mellow sunshine. He recovered his coolness before he had taken twenty steps, but he was annoyed. He was obliged to be content to wait, much against his inclinations. He did wait, with the utmost impatience. The week out he returned to the city. The young man to whom he had spoken previously, remembered him, and seeing that he was resolved on meeting Mr. Vayning, told him, more civilly than he had chosen to be the first time, that Mr. Vayning had sent word he did not intend coming to town this week either.

"There is one question which I trust you will consider yourself at liberty to answer," said Tom, in his most conciliatory manner. "I really have serious business with Mr. Vayning, but it is business of a nature which involves seeing him personally, therefore I can

neither write nor leave a verbal message. May I ask you if he is at Richmond ? ”

The young man looked at him.

“ Yes,” he said, after a momentary hesitation. He felt that there might be special reasons why Mr. Vayning did not choose to gratify the curiosity of every one who liked to ask what his movements were. “ He is at Richmond.”

“ Thank you,” said Tom, quietly. “ I hope he is not ill ? ”

“ No ; I believe he is quite well.”

“ Thank you,” said Tom again. “ Good-morning.”

He went out.

“ Confound it ! ” muttered he, as he walked down the street. “ I *will* see him. What is the matter with the old donkey ? I must see him, and I don’t intend to wait his pleasure, I can assure him.” He went off at once to the South-Western Terminus, and took a third-class ticket for Richmond. Arrived at his destination, he walked rapidly to Jasmine Lodge, at the gate whereof he rang with a determined hand.

“ Is Mr. Rutherford Vayning at home ? ” he

asked, when a servant, apparently the gardener, answered his summons.

"He is, sir," replied the servant.

"I want to see him—on most important business."

The man hesitated. "I am afraid, sir—I cannot say. If you like to come in and wait for a few minutes, I will see."

He opened the gate, and led the way up to the house, where he passed the visitor to a footman, who took him into a room at the side of the hall, requesting him to wait while he went to ask if Mr. Rutherford could see him. The door was left ajar, however, and a girl who was arranging some glasses on a tray at a table in the hall, remained in such a position that she could easily see the whole of the apartment. Tom Wynstyn did not now look exactly the kind of man one would care to leave alone in a handsomely furnished room, if unknown to the inhabitants of the house. He refused to send his name to Mr. Vayning, saying he was a stranger who had called on urgent business.

Presently the man returned, and asked Tom to follow him to the library. This was a long,

rather narrow, but light and pleasant room, with lounges and easy chairs, and a full view through a French window of the greater part of the large garden attached to the house. Two sides of the wall were covered with books, but the room seemed destined more for an agreeable place to loiter away an afternoon than a retreat for study. The servant threw open the door. A tall, handsome, grave-looking man, with a golden beard, half rose from a seat at a table by the window, where he was writing a letter. This man was Major Vayning.

From the few words of apology which the servant endeavoured to offer to the major, it seemed he had made some mistake in his orders, or else Mr. Rutherford Vayning had been ignorant of the circumstance that his son was occupying the library when he directed the man to ask the visitor to wait there. A few easy sentences from the major relieved the man, who quitted the room.

"You wish to see my father?" said Major Vayning, politely indicating a chair. "Will you pardon me if I continue to write, as my letter is of some importance. You will find the morning papers on the table yonder."

He resumed his occupation, while Tom Wynstyn sat down, and affected to glance over the *Times*. From idle curiosity, his eyes roved to the noble figure of the major, who continued to write with a certain rapidity.

About twenty minutes elapsed. The major finished his letter, folded it, placed it in an envelope, and directed it. It was addressed to the Baroness Deveril, Grosvenor Crescent, London.

As he sealed his letter, the major's father, Rutherford Vayning, entered the room. Major Vayning rose, and taking up his letter, went out. He did not see the singular expression which passed over his father's countenance.

Mr. Vayning uttered an exclamation—an exclamation which indicated varied emotions.

“You here!”

“Yes, myself and no other,” answered Tom Dallas, with insolent carelessness. “If not myself, an excellent imitation.”

Mr. Vayning walked over to the window, where Tom was now standing, and looked at him with a half-bewildered gaze. He did not sit down, nor did he ask his visitor to resume his seat.

"Of course," he said, ironically, "after the surprise you have already given me, on a former occasion, I ought not to wonder at any freak you choose to play. I must confess, at the same time, that I *am* surprised. When you sent me your most urgent message, I had not the most distant idea that I should come face to face with *you*."

"I suppose not. The surprise is all the more agreeable, probably. Pleasures are invariably most gratifying when they arrive unexpectedly."

Mr. Vayning stared at him.

"Pish! I thought you were drowned," he said, so abruptly that Tom began to laugh.

"Ah! Your first idea, I dare say, was, wondering where your letters had gone to."

"I cannot say it was. I don't remember."

There was a coolness, almost a jauntiness, in Mr. Vayning's manner after his first surprise had passed which puzzled Tom.

"I suppose if I were to ask you how you came to escape drowning, you would not tell me?" said Mr. Vayning, after a short silence, looking his visitor full in the face.

"I have not the slightest objection to

gratify your curiosity, I assure you. I had been passing the evening with one or two fellows at a place where I used to go sometimes, and overstayed my time. I was too late for the train, consequently too late for the steamer, so did not go to the trouble of trying to catch it. I had my own reasons for not undeceiving people when it got about that I had gone down with the unfortunate devils on board, and so I have been going about in my old style ever since — five or six years, isn't it? It is a simple story, soon told."

"You have been married since I saw you, I believe?"

"Yes, I have."

"I suppose your wife thinks you dead?"

Tom Wynstyn looked at him for a moment.

"She does."

"I don't know why I should trouble myself inquiring into your affairs," said Mr. Vayning with an ironical smile; "but when one meets an old friend, it is natural to ask the news. I presume I may guess what has brought you here to-day?"

"Probably in your guesses you will not be far astray."

Mr. Vayning sat down, and pointed to the chair from which Tom Wynstyn had risen, and which he had not attempted to resume. Mr. Vayning leaned his elbow on the table from which Tom had taken up his newspaper, and looked steadfastly at his visitor.

"Your intention is——?"

"I am desperately hard pushed," said Tom, "otherwise, I assure you, I should not have come." He had lost a good deal of the assurance with which he had formerly greeted Mr. Vayning. Something in the manner of the goldsmith checked him. "I am so hard pushed that I have been obliged to— Well, I need not make humiliating confessions. I want some money. It is nearly half a dozen years since I was with you last, and upon my soul I should not have come to-day if I could have helped it."

"I consider it a most daring piece of audacity on your part to come here to annoy me," said Mr. Vayning, angrily.

"Railing will not make my impudence more or less. Now that I am here, let us talk of business."

"Pray, what do you want now?"

"You mean, how much? Five hundred."

"Five hundred what?"

"Pounds. It isn't likely I should come to ask you for anything else, is it?"

Mr. Vayning regarded him fixedly for a few minutes before replying. "And you think I am going to be the fool to grant your demand, as I did about— Times change, my good friend." Something in his tone startled Tom.

"What do you mean?"

"Look you here," said the other, without answering his question. "I will make you a fair offer. If you will give those cursed letters into my hand here, now, and let me burn them in yonder grate, I will give you a cheque for one hundred pounds—not one farthing more will I give."

Tom was confounded by his manner, which, but for the mocking accents, would have been that of a person totally indifferent to what his visitor might say or do.

"Do not hurry yourself," added Mr. Vayning. "There is no occasion to be precipitate. If at any future time you choose to accept my offer, I shall be equally willing to renew it."

"Perhaps I might do better with the afore-said documents," said Tom, whose face was obviously pale.

"Perhaps so. If you can, by all means do so. As you are not inclined to enter on my proposal, there is no necessity for further waste of time." He rose as he spoke.

"Then you leave me at perfect liberty to do as I please with those precious letters of yours?" said Tom.

"I leave you free as the winds to do or to go where you will. Your movements can possess no interest for me," he added, with a coarse laugh.

Tom rose also from his chair.

"Then I shall tell you what I am going to do," he said. "Within an hour from this time the papers shall be in the hands of——"

"Of whom?" demanded Mr. Vayning, with a repetition of the ironical smile which had greeted almost everything that Tom had said. "Look here, my good friend. I don't want you to go making a fool of yourself, because, though I care little either way, I should prefer concluding this affair quietly, so I may as well

inform you of the fact that my uncle died a week ago."

Tom drew back a step, without replying.

"Yes, it is quite true. He was carried off at one o'clock in the afternoon of Thursday."

The very day on which Tom had paid his visit to Richmond.

"So, you see, now would be your best time for bringing this little affair to an agreeable termination. If you are inclined to close with my very liberal offer, I shall be happy to give you a cheque for one hundred pounds. If you are not disposed to do so, I shall be equally happy to wish you good morning."

The position which they had mutually held towards each other at their last meeting was entirely reversed. Tom had not a word to say. He had come hither so sure of being able to make his own terms, that he was utterly unprepared for this total defeat. He fancied, however, that Mr. Vayning might be trying a bold game, to trick him out of the packet of letters before he could have time to verify his statement. Mr. Vayning saw what was passing in his mind, and going to a table at the end of the room, where a pile of

papers was lying, returned with a copy of the *Times* dated one or two days back. He silently opened it, and folded it down at a paragraph, which he showed to Tom.

It recorded the sudden death, from apoplexy, of that eminent and highly respected citizen, Mr. Theodore Vayning, of the firm of Messrs. Vayning and Vayning, goldsmiths and jewelers, Cornhill.

"You can hardly doubt that," he said, with quiet triumph. "Here is the notice in the obituary, if you want to see that too. Come, what are you going to do?"

Tom took some small silver coin from his waistcoat pocket, tossed it into the air, caught it, looked at it, and replaced it in his pocket.

"Le jeu est fait. Rien ne va plus," said he, imperturbably. "I accept your offer."

"Where are the papers?"

"Here." He took them from his pocket-book as he spoke.

"Wait here until I return," said Mr. Vayning. He left the room, and presently came back with an oblong book in his hand. Without addressing Tom, he sat down and wrote a

few lines on one of the pages, and then tearing out the leaf, placed it on the table.

"Give me those papers," he said.

Tom threw the packet across to him. He carefully examined and counted the letters; then, having satisfied himself, while Tom took up the cheque, he slowly struck a match, and set fire to the terrible sheets of semi-transparent green paper, one by one, dropping the ashes on the fender when the papers had been consumed.

"Our business is done, I think?" he coolly observed, pushing back his chair, and elevating his heavy eyebrows as he looked at Tom. He reached out his hand, and rang the bell violently. Tom never uttered a word, and scarcely answered his icy, formal "Good morning" when the servant opened the door.

Tom emerged into the dusty road with a sensation almost of shame. It was disconcerting to have the tables so completely turned, when he had entered on the attack with such a flattering *Veni, vidi, vici* kind of anticipation. He fancied he might have managed, even in his reverse, to carry things with a high hand; yet what, he asked himself,

could he have done? Nothing. Fate was against him this time.

The next day he was off to Baden. Before the week was out, he had lost every farthing of the hundred pounds which he had extorted from Mr. Vayning.

Decidedly fate was against him.

CHAPTER X.

AT LADY DEVERIL'S HOUSE IN GROSVENOR
CRESCENT.

FATE was so obstinate, so viciously spiteful, that Tom found himself driven to his wits' end. He had often been subjected to the changes of Fortune, but the tide had never ebbed away so completely as it had now done, leaving him stranded. He continued to call himself Tom Dallas, for many people knew him only too well under that name, while almost all his old friends were totally ignorant of the alteration he had once effected. He avoided all the places where he might have become known as Sir Thomas Jervoise, and if any one who had seen him during his short period of splendour as the English baronet encountered him now, his identity was con-

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fused into a supposed "accidental likeness." Since his return to his former haunts, however, he had lost much of that original geniality and careless good temper, which had erst made him so popular. He was scarcely changed in outward appearance, though he had, during the last five or six years, had many a hard struggle with Fortune. This time, the more he endeavoured to retrieve his luck, the more embarrassed became his circumstances. At last, driven to despair, he resolved on a step which he had firmly determined for years he would never take. He ascertained where his wife was living. She had quitted Lugano for a time, and was now in London.

About six weeks after his second visit to Richmond, he was sitting in a coffee-house, situated in one of the streets off the Strand. The room was musty and close; the windows were covered with dust and the long streaks caused by the rain beating against them from time to time; the round and oblong tables were also dusty, scattered over with splashes from tea and coffee cups, and crumbs of bread. A melancholy silence brooded over the place

at this hour, broken occasionally by the sound made by some one washing or rinsing cups and plates in the kitchen, which was on a level with the coffee-room. Tom wrote a note in a free, dashing hand. He began without address, date, or even the name of the person to whom he was writing.

“I write this in order that you may not be too much startled when you learn that I am still living.” Here a word or two was scratched out. “What a dreadful idea it is to think that one’s wife must necessarily be filled with horror and fear on hearing that one is not dead after all! God knows I love you too much to be able to bear with equanimity the thought of annoying you in any way. I had intended never to reveal the fact that I am living, not dead; but I am pressed by a hard strait. I am in London only for a short time. I do not wish to torment you in any way whatever. Will you see me for half an hour?” This note he placed in an envelope, and fastened it, directing it to his wife.

He was lodging temporarily in this shabby place, so came and went without question. He went up to his own room, and carefully

arranged his toilet, removing every speck of dust from his garments, and otherwise making himself as presentable as possible. Every shilling of his own money had vanished at Baden; but he had contrived to retain his clothes, and to borrow a few pounds to carry him to England, and pay his expenses for three or four weeks. When he came downstairs, and emerged into the street, he looked just his old handsome self.

On gaining the Strand, he deliberated for a moment the advisability of economizing by taking an omnibus. He decided finally for a cab, and hailed a hansom, ordering the driver to go to Grosvenor Crescent. Having gained the house of the Baroness Deveril, he alighted, and rang. The door was opened by an elephantine hall-porter.

"Is Lady Deveril in town?"

"She is, sir."

"Is she at home?"

"She is, sir."

Tom paid his cabman, dismissed him, and entered.

"I wish to see the baroness, to whom my name is, I believe, unknown. I shall therefore

send this letter in place of a card," said Tom, with the coolest air imaginable.

The man glanced at the letter and passed it to one of the footmen, who was lounging near. This servant led the stranger into an ante-room, and left him. At the expiration of, perhaps, twenty minutes he re-appeared, and requested the visitor to follow him, up a magnificent flight of richly carpeted stairs, to a landing adorned with statues and rare exotics, which led to a beautiful conservatory on one side, and into a sumptuously furnished drawing room on the other. The footman threw open the door of the drawing-room.

"My lady will be with you in a few moments, sir," said the man, before closing the door softly.

Tom looked round with idle curiosity. It was an unusually beautiful room, furnished with the most exquisite taste. Pictures, statuettes, books, rare articles of vertu, the most expensive and delicate productions of nature and art, scattered with a lavish yet judicious hand, met the eye on every side. The walls, panelled with frames of finely carved ebony filled with rich violet velvet

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alternated with mirrors, were relieved with white statuettes and some exquisite pictures, and silver candlesticks. The room had been a fancy with the last Lord Deveril, who, although a country gentleman in every sense of the word, had possessed the most delicate taste and love for beauty. Tom, having glanced around, smiled to himself, whistled softly, and walked over to the superb white marble chimney-piece, where he arranged his cravat before the glass; then he inspected his general appearance, sauntered about the room, opened the piano—a splendid instrument—ran his fingers over the keys, and finally threw himself at full length on one of the ottomans.

“The fact is, my lady wife has plenty of money to spare,” he muttered. “I don’t see why I should be scrupulous.” And yet, even at this moment, he could not help regretting that he had come. He wished he had never seen Lucille; he bitterly repented having married her—for her sake, not for his own. He felt as if, could he now undo what he had done, no sacrifice would be too great. At the same time, having been done, why, it

could do no good his worrying himself about it, and he must only make the best of it; and, after all——

The door opened, and Lucille appeared on the threshold.

She did not advance for, perhaps, two full minutes; then, slowly closing the door, she moved a few steps towards him, her eyes fixed on his face, her arms hanging by her side. She was ashy pale—pale as death, and she walked like a somnambulist. He rose from the ottoman, but did not advance towards her. Lucille did not remove her gaze from his face. He never uttered a syllable, until at last his head bent, and his face grew pale, partly from anger, partly from shame. He wished heartily now that he had not come.

“Sit down,” said Lucille, at last, in an icy tone, pointing to a chair. “You showed some consideration in giving me a little preparation——” She held out the note which he had written. “O my God!” she cried, passionately, pressing her hands against her breast, “how far am I to suffer?”

“No one can regret more deeply than I do, the wrong which I have done you,” said Tom,

in a very low tone, looking at his wife, a softened expression in his dark eyes.

"Why did you——" Her voice died away; she could not frame the words she wished to utter.

"I fancied it would be better for your peace to think me dead. I never meant to undeceive you. It was almost entirely for your sake that I——"

"Liar! You cared for nothing but yourself. It suited you to play the villain, and you have done so, without reckoning what misery, what ruin you inflicted on others—even on those whom it was your duty—Duty! what do I speak of? Duty!—speak of duty to you!" Her words were succeeded by a little outburst of hysterical laughter. "I suppose it is best I should know the truth. Yes, I thank you for coming to save me from a great danger, for dragging me back from the edge of a precipice. Yes, it is well to know the truth. Oh, how could you—how could you be so cruel, to let me think——"

"Well, after all, no great harm has been done," interrupted Tom, roughly. "It is only just that you should reproach me. Yes,

it is only just. Yet it was, as I have already said, partly my love for you which led me to— I thought I would free you from my presence which——”

Lucille answered by another outburst of derisive laughter. He approached her, and suddenly kneeling before her, seized her hands and kissed them repeatedly. Then he as abruptly caught her in his arms, and rained kisses on her mouth, her cheeks, her hair, her eyes—even her soft round throat and pinky ears, even her very dress.

“My love, my darling—the only woman I ever cared for—will you not forgive me?” he cried. “I will do anything you may command if I can only atone. I swear to you——”

Lucille struggled desperately to free herself; then, starting back, struck him violently several times on the chest with her clenched hand, her eyes flashing fire.

“How dare you touch me!” she cried vehemently. “I will never forgive you—never, never! How dare you touch me!”

Tom’s countenance changed. He started to his feet, and drew back.

"Very well, very well," he said. "Be it so. Death *has* parted us, it is true."

"What did you come here for?" she asked. "You come for your own purposes, not to do me any service—of that I am perfectly well assured. What do you want?"

"My intention in coming here was——" He stopped.

"You want money, I suppose?" she demanded, sarcastically. "You need not answer. I see it. How much?"

"Will you give me one hundred pounds?"

Without replying she left the room. She had not even asked him how he had escaped the fate which all thought had befallen him. The passing regret which he had felt on his first entrance into the room was changed to a feeling as near akin to vindictive anger as his indolent nature could admit, but he doubly repented having come at all. He buried his face in his hands. He had never experienced sensations like these in all his life before. As he was reflecting, a pretty childish voice was heard at the door, which was ajar.

"Titty, Titty," cried the voice, half laugh-

ing, half indignant. "Tiny wants to do into de dwawing-woom."

"Tiny must not go in there," answered the voice, apparently of a young woman.

"Naughty Tiny," continued the child's voice. "Tome upstairs di-weekly—naughty Tiny tat you are. What a foolish Tiny you are! Tome here di-weekly."

A small, white fluffy dog ran into the drawing-room and barked violently at the stranger. He was followed by the child, the one who had spoken. A tall, slender girl of perhaps six years of age, with dark eyes and short curly hair. She was dressed for walking, with a little velvet hat and silk skirt. On beholding the stranger she started back. Tom looked at her. A sudden tremor seized him.

"Bon Dieu! what have I to learn? Can it be——" He rose from his chair. The little girl, with an air of perfect dignity and composure, regarded him, not retreating, but casting a momentary glance through the open door to see if her maid was within sight. Emboldened by the assurance that Kitty was almost at her side, she again looked at the stranger. Tom went towards her. He was

handsome and well-dressed—two qualities which have an extraordinary influence with children,—and although she retreated a few steps towards the door, she continued to look at him, and stood her ground bravely.

“Who are you, my dear child?” he asked, fearing the answer.

Marie opened her eyes. She was rather pleased with him, but she did not answer until he repeated his question.

“Why,” she replied, then, with a grave smile, “I am mamma’s ’ittle dirl.”

“And who is your mamma?”

Marie laughed a little at this. She thought everybody must know her mamma.

“The servants tall mamma ‘My Lady,’—she is my mamma,” she said, again laughing a little, as if amused. “I tame in to mate Tiny do away, betause mamma doesn’t lite Tiny to do into de dwawing-woom.”

“Where is your papa?” asked Tom.

Marie looked grave—very, very grave; and those great luminous eyes of hers clouded over.

“Papa is dead,” she answered. “I never saw papa.”

"Was your papa—anything—like me?" asked Tom. It was one of those foolish remarks which people sometimes address to children.

"I don't know," gravely replied Marie. "I never saw papa. Dood-bye. I must do upstairs."

Tom tried to detain her, but she had caught Tiny as the little creature endeavoured to gallop past her, and she now retired, waving her hand, with a graceful valedictory gesture, to Tom. He did not dare to stop her; he could not have touched her.

Five minutes later, Lucille swept into the room, and silently placed in his hands a cheque. He had asked for one hundred pounds. The cheque was for a thousand. Without looking at it in reality, although his eyes were fixed upon the piece of flimsy paper, Tom held it in his hands for some seconds. Then he abruptly turned to his wife.

"Whose child is that?" he asked.

Lucille shivered as she drew back.

"What child?" She endeavoured to steady her voice—in vain.

"The child whom I saw just now."

What a strange, wonderful study it would have been could it have been possible to trace the mysterious turns and changes of thought which had, in the course of half a dozen years, altered the outward bearing of these two human beings. Six years before, she had been soft, mild, forgiving; he had been callous, hard, careless of what he did and said. It seemed now as if their characters were changed. She was cold, bitter in her manner; he subdued, sad, dispirited.

"Whose child?" said Lucille, almost defiantly. "MINE."

She said this with an accent, which added of itself, "Claim her if you dare," and her eyes flashed. He never answered one word, but continued to look steadily at the piece of paper in his hand. It would be impossible to follow the rapid train of painful thoughts which raced through his mind during those few minutes; but at last, without looking at Lucille, he slowly folded the cheque, the figures on which he had hardly noticed, and tearing it into twenty fragments, threw the morsels of paper on the fender. Then he turned on her those wonderfully fascinating

eyes, now full of a thousand different meanings. She was unable to withdraw her gaze from his, but she sank into a chair, her clasped hands falling on her lap. She feared she was going to faint, for everything seemed to become indistinct, and to swim round her, but by a powerful effort she recalled her senses before they left her. Tom kept his eyes fixed on her, watching her as she grew paler and paler, and then, as the colour began to flow back into her cheeks again. He felt as if he had never really loved her until that moment, when he had done her an injury far transcending any that he had ever done before.

“I know what you think—I can see mirrored in your face, as in a glass, the suspicions which are floating through your mind,” he said, at last, when he saw that the danger was over. “You fancy that what I have just done is a *coup de théâtre*—a trick to ensnare you against your better judgment. You are mistaken. I am—I always have been—mad, flighty, a rebel against all established rules; but I am not—I never have been—a positive villain. It would have been better for me, I have no doubt, if I had been.

Only once in my life, before to-day, I wanted to perpetrate a mean and pitiful action—I wanted to induce a poor boy to commit a theft, because I fancied he could do it with impunity; and ever since, I have suffered more than anybody can imagine, for that piece of wickedness. I never rested until I had repaired the evil he did in a moment of madness. My best friends—and my best friends,” he added, laughing bitterly, “are the worst enemies of other people—could not say that I am a mean villain. I came here with repugnance. I should not have come, only I thought I could not help myself. And now, I could no more take your money than I could put a pistol to your head and slay you. I thought I could play the sneak, and I find it is beyond my skill. I may be a fool—doubtless I am so—but—I cannot do it. I ought not to have returned. I ought never to have revealed to you the dreadful fact of—that I—— But the mischief is done now. The only reparation I can make now is to go away, and be firm in the resolution which I have made anew, never to approach you again.”

He could not now see the expression on Lucille's face, for she had bent her head upon her arms, which were resting on the back of the chair whereon she sat. A slight, curious, gasping breath, drawn every few minutes, afforded the only token that she heard and understood what he was saying.

"The probability is, that you do not credit one word of what I am saying to you. I think, though, if it happened to be my way, I should feel terrifically sorry for all my misdeeds. I do feel sorry as far as you are concerned; and I here swear to you, that you shall never hear of me again, unless—until you hear, perhaps, that I am dead. And then, let us hope that——"

He did not complete the sentence, which would have been too cruelly bitter, but took the hand which lay helplessly by her side, amid the folds of her dress, pressed it to his lips, and was gone before she could raise her head. She did not try to hinder him from going. She had not uttered one sentence since she had cried out that the child was hers. She did not lift her white face to the light until the time-piece had ticked off

fourteen or fifteen minutes. She remained immovable, as if turned into stone. At last she looked up, and what a change had come over her face—terrible—the very eyes were changed.

“What shall I do! What shall I do!” she cried aloud. “I am undone!”

CHAPTER XI.

WRECKED.

MAJOR VAYNING's cab dashed up to the house of the Baroness Deveril, and the major scarcely waited for the vehicle to stop before he opened the door and jumped out. He had often come to the house when Lucille was absent, and stayed until her return, so he dismissed the cab before touching the bell, ordering the man to return in an hour. He was so eager that he did not think of looking up at the windows, or he must inevitably have observed that the shutters were closed, and that the house was evidently vacant. His summons was answered by a dowdy, middle-aged woman, who wore a cap and apron of uncertain hues. The major started back.

"Is— Has Lady Deveril left town?" he

asked, feeling at the same time what an absurd question it was, when the answer was so obvious. Then, without waiting for a reply, he went into the hall, and closed the door himself. "Is there anybody in the house besides yourself?" he demanded.

"Oh dear, yes, sir. Mrs. Hartley, sir."

"Call her immediately. Tell her I want to see her directly."

Mrs. Hartley came immediately, with a letter in her hand. The major raised his hat, for he was one of those courteous men who pay respect to all women.

"Pray," he said, his voice trembling a little as he spoke, in spite of his effort to control it, "how long is it since Lady Deveril quitted town? I was here a fortnight since, and I did not then know that she had the slightest idea of going. I see, from the state of the house, that she has departed with the intention of remaining absent some time. Has she left any message for me?"

"Yes, sir. She did leave very hurriedly, without explaining her reasons to me. She went away a week ago, and she said she would not write to you—that is to say, she wrote a

letter, but thought it better not to send it to you, but to let it wait until you called."

"A letter? Give it to me," cried the major, holding out his hand.

"The drawing-room is all at sixes and sevens, sir, but if you would like to go up there——"

Major Vayning did not hear her. With trembling fingers he had torn open the letter. Mrs. Hartley retired a few steps, and waited.

"I don't understand it," he said, aloud, without directly addressing Mrs. Hartley, and staring wildly about, as a man does who has been shot.

He looked faint and white, and the house-keeper repeated her invitation that he should go upstairs. This time he accepted, or rather, acceded to, her invitation, and followed her. They were about to pass a charming little conservatory on the landing at the top of the first flight of stairs, when Major Vayning stopped, and said he thought he should prefer going in there, and sitting down. It was a beautiful little nest, filled with exotics, ferns, and a profusion of the wilder and more gorgeous productions of nature. This place had

not been disturbed, while the furniture was all covered, and the rooms darkened, so it was the best spot he could have selected. A fountain standing in the middle of the conservatory softly broke the silence with a soothing plash of waters.

Mrs. Hartley left him here ; but when she went away, she had the consideration to think that a glass of wine would do the gentleman some good, so she presently returned with a tray, on which were a decanter of wine and one containing water, with a glass and some biscuits.

"Thank you, Mrs. Hartley," said the major, mechanically. "Oh, wait one moment. I wanted to ask you—Lady Deveril left suddenly. May I ask you— You are entirely ignorant of the reason why she went away so unexpectedly?"

"Quite, I assure you, sir."

"May I beseech you to try to throw some little light on the matter? It is, I assure you, a matter of life and death to me."

Mrs. Hartley hesitated. She really knew nothing, and she did not like to offer surmises when her mistress chose to maintain a certain

reservation, if not secrecy. She shrewdly guessed, however, the fact that some kind of engagement existed between the major and Lady Deveril, and she connected some small links of surmises with this grand guess.

"I know nothing about it, I tell you again, sir," she said, slowly. "But——"

"You can form no idea—nothing has occurred——"

"If I tell you what I have guessed, you must only take what I say for what it is worth; and certainly, sir, my lady has not enjoined me not to speak. She went away in such grief, anybody could see it that had eyes in their head—deep, quiet grief, you know—in such grief that really I believe the poor soul—if I may be pardoned for using such an expression—hardly knew what she was doing."

"Go on, go on, my dear Mrs. Hartley. This letter is utterly unintelligible to me, and tells me nothing. I do not even know whither Lady Deveril has gone."

"Then, sir, if my lady does not choose you to know that, I am surely wrong in telling you anything."

"My dear Mrs. Hartley, five minutes ago I

came to this house happy, full of bright hopes and thoughts ; and now—you have seen the change. Will you not have some pity on me ? There is some mistake somewhere. I must have some explanation, and you run no risk of betraying the whereabouts of your lady, if she desires it to be kept secret, as you do not know it. There can be no harm in telling me what you think."

"No, sir, I did not say I was ignorant of where my lady had gone to, I believe—" The housekeeper considered. She went over to the door, and tried it, although she knew there could be no one within hearing.

"I think you ought to know, sir ; and so I will tell you just what has happened. About a week ago a gentleman called here. We never have many visitors, so it is easy to remember them."

"A gentleman ? What was he like ?"

"Tall, dark, very handsome, quite an aristocrat, well dressed, and all that. He stayed with my lady for perhaps a matter of an hour, and then he went away. When he was gone, my lady went up to her own room. I did not see her, but her maid told me that she looked

as white as a sheet of paper, and was trembling all over."

"Then——"

"Well, then, she ordered her maid to pack up, and she sent for me. She told me she was going out of town, and as she did not offer to tell me where she was going, I did not, of course, like to take the liberty of asking—of course I could not, as it was not my place. Then she wrote two letters, one of which I have given to you, the other for a foreign place, I forget the name of it."

"Not—not Lugano?"

"Yes, that was it, exactly, sir. To a gentleman named—dear me, my head *is* so bad for names, I never can remember them. Besides, of course it isn't my place to go repeating all my lady's doings, only— Well, sir, she went the next day, and the house was shut up, and that is really all I know about it, which isn't much, sir, and throws very little light on the matter. And, perhaps, it is wrong of me to talk about it at all."

"Nay, thank you a thousand times," said Major Vayning, taking her hand in his eagerness, and pressing it.

"Are you going, sir?"

"In a few minutes. I can find my way down, thank you, so I shall not ask you to stay."

The housekeeper curtseyed, and left him. He returned to his letter, trying to make sense of it by means of the faint glimmer of light which Mrs. Hartley's little revelation had struck. It began with the utmost abruptness, as if she dared not address him by any epithet indicative of love or fondness, and yet could not bring herself to write formally, as if to a stranger or mere ordinary acquaintance. The characters were unsteady and scattered; her hand had evidently trembled almost beyond her power of control.

"Forgive me," she wrote, "I must not see you—I cannot—it would break my heart. Do not try to see me, I implore you. It would be useless. Have pity on me. The world has grown dark to me. Forgive me for the injury I have done you." (Here the writing was completely blotted with tears, so that some words were entirely illegible.) "I erred through ignorance. I do not ask you to forget me; I could not—it would be too great misery for me.—LUCILLE."

Major Vayning was very clear in his perceptions, and quick in the deductions which he drew. He did, indeed, comparing what the housekeeper had told him with the otherwise wild and unintelligible contents of Lucille's letter, see at a glance what had happened. With an ardent, passionate nature, he possessed one of the coolest judgments ever owned by man, as he had often proved. Tenderness he had in abundance, as every living creature that came near him could have testified. Nothing could have been more touching than to see him sitting by the bedside of some poor invalid soldier, reading in his low, soft, musical tones, or talking to him with the sympathy of a friend, a brother; the junior officers, who declared him to be "no end of a splendid fellow," came to him alike in their troubles and their joys; the elder officers—his seniors in rank and in years—sought and took his advice, never obtruded, but freely given when asked. With his boundless fund of tenderness, it had been an unsolved mystery why he never seemed to love, or to have the most distant thought of marrying. The most inveterate flirt stood

abashed in his presence, the most timid little creatures confided in him as a big brother, and united in making him a general father confessor. Surmises had naturally been made until the subject was abandoned by all as absolutely profitless. Joined with this extraordinary tenderness, he had the firm, iron nerves of an old paladin. Those soft white hands, small and delicate as those of a beautiful woman, could equally soothe and caress a dying child, as they had often done, or plant a scaling ladder against the enemy's ramparts in a forlorn hope. All men, we know, have their faults and sins, which usually lie close to the surface; but it would have been difficult to discover the weak points of Sackville Vayning. No one had ever tried to find them out—no one would have thanked the successful explorer. Not that he was a hypocrite, or strove to appear better than his neighbours; on the contrary, he was open as the day, and had a frank smile for those in joy, as he had those low, soft, inexpressibly sweet tones for those in sorrow. He may have had secrets folded in his past life, or he may have had none. Few would care to have the book of

their life turned over page by page by a casual hand. He was, at all events, one of the very few who know how sublime a thing it is to suffer and be strong. As he sat now, his first paleness and affright past, he looked calmly self-reliant; his fingers slightly, but firmly closed on the little sheet of pink-tinted paper; his tall form rather drawn up; his soft, clear eyes, bent down in profound reflection. The lines of suffering round the mouth were hidden by the brown moustache and long beard; the curves on his forehead were signs as much of intense meditation as of pain.

So immersed was he in thought that he did not notice how the minutes ebbed away, and he was surprised when Mrs. Hartley reappeared.

"I came to see if you were here, sir," she said. "I did not know but what you might have gone. Your brougham is at the door, and your servant said you told him to call for you."

"Thank you, thank you," said Major Vayning, hastily, folding up Lucille's note, and placing it in his pocket-book. "Good morning, Mrs. Hartley; I cannot sufficiently thank you for your kindness to me this morning."

He extended his hand to her, with one of those smiles which had won so many hearts, and then ran downstairs.

“ Home ! ” he cried to his servant.

The instant he was in his own room, at his chambers, he sat down and wrote to his sister, who was at Lugano. He begged of her not to lose an hour in writing to tell him if Mr. Wynstyn was at Lugano, and if not, where he had gone. This young sister was his confidant in everything, so he wrote a perfectly minute account of what had happened that morning. He broke into no rhapsodies of despair, or anything of that kind; but his quiet way of simply detailing what had occurred, and his own comments thereon, were more terrible to read than sheets of complainings would have been. He knew that of necessity Lucille would send for Mr. Wynstyn in her strait, whatever it might be; if he could ascertain where the old man was, he felt tolerably sure of finding Lucille; for he must see her in spite of her prohibition. It was right to see her, in any case, he said to himself and to his sister,

CHAPTER XII.

MORE BITTER FAR THAN DEATH.

MARGARET VAYNING, although ten years the major's junior, had always been his confidant. During his frequent and lengthened absences from home, in India and elsewhere, he had written to her constantly. It was in order to devote himself to her that he had quitted the army, for symptoms so alarming had developed themselves in her delicate frame, that the physicians had ordered her abroad, and as there was no one to accompany her, her sisters being all married, while her father could not leave his business for more than a few weeks in the course of the autumn, Sackville, as her only brother, had voluntarily given up all his time to her. When he first met Lucille at the house of Ettie, he was still attached to his

regiment, and had no thought of leaving it. In truth, it was an undefined feeling towards the beautiful young widow that kept him lingering in the neighbourhood. The young Marchioness Carluthen was anxious to retain him, for she had organized a little party for her own amusement, and did not wish to have it broken up. When Ettie left Lugano, the major yet lingered there, being on intimate and friendly terms with the family at the little white villa where he had passed so many pleasant hours. He was at last obliged to return to his regimental duties; but two or three months after this, he learnt that his sister was ordered abroad, and he went to England to ascertain what was to be done. At the time, it was with no selfish or ulterior motive that he relinquished his commission, and gave up all his time and attention to Margaret. She was certain of something of which he was ignorant—namely, that he was irretrievably attached to the Baroness Deveril; for during his stay at Lugano, and even after he left the place, his letters had betrayed him completely. She felt curious to see this beautiful creature, and asked him to

take her to this particular region, to which, she laughingly said, she had taken some unaccountable fancy. He had gladly agreed to her wish, and she was so charmed with the little family, and especially with Lucille, the climate suited her so admirably, and everything seemed to point with such unanimity at the advantages of this nook, that they had by degrees settled there. The physicians gave no hope that she would ultimately recover, for the consumption of which she was dying, if slow, was undeniably fatal in its symptoms. In Margaret, Lucille found the friend whom she had needed but had not met with before in her life. The tastes of the one were identical with those of the other, and soon there sprang up between the two a tender friendship, pure and delicate as their souls, all the more beautiful as each knew that a few brief months—at most, half a dozen years—would part them for ever in this world. Margaret—Pet, as she was universally called—watched with anxious interest the progress of the attachment which grew up between her brother and her friend, and by her unseen influence drew them nearer together. She

had long wished that her brother should marry, and now it seemed as if her desires were to be fulfilled. The major was in a position to marry, for not only would he be heir to his father's large fortune, but from his maternal grandfather he had lately inherited a splendid estate in the south of England. Lucille had for two or three years continued in ignorance that she entertained more than a cordial friendship for Sackville Vayning; the idea of ever marrying again never once occurred to her; and he, although he learnt the nature of his feelings towards her at a comparatively early stage of their acquaintance, seeing that she did not understand him, or appear to regard him as anything more than a very dear friend, did not care to enter on any explanation which might end in his being obliged to leave her. At last the explanation had come, and they were engaged.

The house which Major Vayning had taken for his sister was under the special care of an old friend, who regarded Pet as her own daughter, and who, having no children of her own, and being a widow, had determined to be with Pet until the last. Miss Vayning,

however, saw Barbara every day, and the two girls were like sisters. Pet, like her brother, had the rare gift of gaining the affection of every one. Mr. Wynstyn was almost as fond of her as he was of Barbara and Lucille. It happened that Pet had been detained overnight by heavy rains, which had come on suddenly after a lovely afternoon and evening, and she was breakfasting with Barbara and Mr. Wynstyn when Lucille's incoherent letter arrived. Lucille had been obliged to go to London, for medical advice in some juvenile disorder which had attacked Marie, and had now been absent for more than two months. Major Vayning had been summoned by his father on the death of Theodore Vayning, chiefly that he might be present at the reading of the old man's will.

There was no letter for Barbara, although Lucille had been punctual and careful in writing to her.

Mr. Wynstyn stared blankly at the lines before him, and then looked at the two girls, who had recognized the handwriting; then he looked at the letter again. It contained a few sentences, hastily scribbled.

"MY DEAR FATHER AND FRIEND,

"Come to me at once. Lose no time. I must see you, but I dare not go to you. Marie is well.

"LUCILLE.

"Holme Priory, Saturday."

He did not read this to the girls. In an instant the truth flashed across his mind.

"What is the matter, dear uncle?" inquired Barbara. Pet's eyes asked the same question.

"Nothing—that is, I must not say that—for— Well, my dear child, don't ask me—indeed, I don't know, that I can safely and truly say; but I must go at once to England—to Lyndon Holme, where Lady Deveril is now. I cannot tell you what the matter is, but she wants to see me immediately. You will not be afraid to remain here alone?"

"Oh, I shall not be alone. I shall have my dear Pet to stay with," answered Barbara. "But I should like— Our dear baroness is not ill?"

"No, no, my dear. But I really cannot tell you anything about it, except that she seems to be well, and the child is also well."

The same day he quitted Lugano. Two or

three days after, Barbara received a short letter from him, announcing his safe arrival, but giving her very scant satisfaction as to the precise cause of the hasty summons. Pet was thus able to give her brother the information that Mr. Wynstyn was at this time, to the best of her belief, at Lyndon Holme. This information gained, Major Vayning had no scruple in going down at once to Lyndon Holme, with the intention of seeing Lucille.

When he went to Holme Priory, he found that Lucille was there, but it was impossible to obtain an interview. The baroness, the servants told him, had given most stringent orders that she was not "at home" to any one. Under this trial, the major chafed. He was determined, in any case, to have some personal explanation. He not only called several times during the week, but he wrote most urgently. Lucille wrote once in reply. "I beseech you," she said, "do not ask to see me. It would break my heart, and it is useless. Forgive me. Forget me, if it be possible." After that, she would not write again, and the major wrote to Mr. Wynstyn, but did not know until a day or two afterwards, that

tho old man had returned to Lugano. Then the major began to haunt the Priory. Lucille never once appeared even in the grounds. She was unable, from indisposition, to get out on Sunday, when he had hoped to obtain a glimpse of her. He at last happened to unconsciously enlist the sympathies of a sentimental maid-servant, who, understanding her mistress to be a widow, and seeing plainly there was some "love affair" going on, and surmising that some tiff had caused a separation between her and the handsome visitor who was so persistent, took upon herself to try to smooth the ruffled course of true love. This young woman threw herself in the major's way, and hinted her willingness to assist him, as he was about to go away after another unsuccessful effort to see the baroness. The girl mysteriously intimated that she would gladly give him a notion as to how he could see her lady without compromising anybody about her.

"If you choose to walk round the house before going away, sir, nobody can hinder you, you know, without being rude. Nobody need know anything about it, and you may, perhaps,

find what you want in the little room built out on the garden. It is near the great ash-tree. Do you know anything of the house or the grounds, sir?"

The major said he had never been inside the house, nor within the grounds, beyond that part leading up to the portico.

"Then, if you like, sir, I'll just show you where it is." She flitted before him for a few paces, and then stopped. "You see the side there—with the French door and the little flight of steps? That's it, sir."

He thanked her, substantially. She for a moment wanted to reject the gold piece which glittered on her palm, but thought better of her foolishness, and disappeared with a broad smile. It was vexatious to be obliged thus to intrigue with servants to gain what ought to be his right, but it could not be helped, and he must only try to make the best of the matter, and be thankful that he had had any assistance at all. He felt that he must proceed very cautiously, and knew that, after all, it was only a chance of finding Lucille. The door or window of the room was not visible until he completely turned the sharp angle

of the projecting side wall. The room had been an after-thought of the persons inhabiting the house, and not designed by the original architect. It had, indeed, been built by one of the Barons Deveril, for the pleasure of the lady to whom he was betrothed, and was intended as a sitting-room for her during the summer. It was placed like a plover's nest amid surrounding trees, and overlooked a small, beautifully planted garden, which was apart from the other gardens, and attached to the little morning-room—"Lady Anne's room," as it was called.

Major Vayning stopped at the foot of the short flight of steps, and looked up. One door was open, the other half closed; but he could not see into the room, for the lace curtains were drawn across, and although one was slightly fanned to and fro by the soft breeze sweeping through the trees and over the flower-beds, it did not move sufficiently to reveal the interior of the apartment. He was at a loss what to do. He was resolute in his determination to see Lucille at all hazards, otherwise he would have turned away and left the place. The birds chirping overhead, the

brown leaves fluttering, the distant rippling of water from a fountain—these peaceful sounds seemed to make the solitude profound, as if no human being besides himself were near.

Suddenly he heard, very close to him, some one crying and sobbing as if in the most intense anguish. The crying was low and incessant; the sobs seemed to escape, half stifled, from a breast overladen with grief. It was a woman's voice, and his heart stood still as he heard it. He dared not betray his vicinity: he could not go away. Then he heard his name pronounced—breathed out in scarcely audible accents, full of the bitterest despair, "Oh, Sackville, Sackville!"

He hesitated no longer, but cleared the five or six steps with a stride, and pushed past the lace curtains. Lucille was kneeling before an antique, high-backed oak-chair, on which was placed open a large Bible. Her face was buried in her handkerchief, her hands pressed tightly over her bowed head, the ruffled hair falling in loose tresses between the slender white fingers. She looked the impersonation of intense anguish. On hearing him, she turned round, but did not rise, as if she

fancied her sight deceived her. A moment after, she sprang up, and glanced wildly round the room, as if with the idea of escaping. Sackville Vayning caught her hands to effectually hinder her from flying. She looked affrightedly in his face, and the next instant was sobbing on his breast.

“Why did you try to prohibit me from seeing you?” he asked, very softly. “It could serve no good purpose, and was both unjust and cruel. But I did not come here to reproach you. I have come to ask you why you wrote that letter, and why——”

She looked up at him again, for an instant, and then her head fell to its resting-place. Then she sobbed out her anguish and despair.

He listened very quietly. He could not see her face, for she pressed it against his breast. He was looking fixedly before him, and his lips were firmly closed, drawn down at the corners, with an expression which those who knew him intimately always felt was the sign of intense suffering. He never relaxed his hold of her, but kept his arm round her, as if to shield her while she told the cruel story. At last she ended. Sack-

ville never uttered a word, and they remained thus, perfectly silent, for several minutes. The golden sunshine came through the open door, flooding the room with the glory of its presence; the scent of the autumn flowers floated in, borne on the faint breeze which fluttered the flossy curls escaped from the ribbon that had bound them. A bird, perched on the branch of a tree near the house, kept on singing as it were the outpouring of a heart full of joy and thankfulness—trill, trill, trill, chirp, chirp, chirp, tweet, tweet, tweet, over and over again unceasingly. The major had heard this bird when he approached the house, and he now listened as if he could think of nothing else. He tried to arrange his thoughts—he could not, but mechanically listened to the bird which sang and piped outside.

Then he looked down at the regal head lying on his breast, and a terrible, unworthy thought darted into his brain, scorpion-like. His soul rebelled against this suffering, entailed by the sins of another—the innocent for the guilty. He could not, he would not give up this woman, who, when his sister was

gone, would be the only creature in the world near and dear to him. He raised her face, and pushed the hair off her forehead. Her eyes were closed, she seemed to fear to move or to speak, letting her cheek rest against his shoulder. He knew that he had simply to breathe a wish, and she would accede to it. He knew now that she had been wise in seeking to fly from him. Major Vayning had been in many a fierce fight, but never, in the course of his life, had he endured such a conflict as this which he passed through this day. He had not made the slightest spoken comment on Lucille's story; he had not uttered one syllable since she had begun to tell it.

As he looked down at the pale face against his shoulder, a little gold cross attached to his watch-guard dropped and rested on Lucille's arm. The sunlight seemed to concentrate in burning rays on the bars of this cross, and thence to scintillate and flash on the walls and ceiling of the room. The day was nearly won. Major Vayning's eyes turned from the face of the woman he loved to the cross, and his heart seemingly ceased to beat. Still

keeping his arm from about her, he detached the cross, touched it to his lips for a moment, touched it to her lips, and then fastened it to the chain hanging from her neck. Then he folded his arms round her, and pressed her very closely for a minute.

"God bless you, my darling," he said. "God preserve you and keep you for ever. I was not wrong in coming. I could not help it, and I must have seen you somehow. I suppose such happiness as I looked forward to would not have been good for me. God knows best. But it is very hard. I cannot lose you altogether. I do not ask to see you again. I will never try to see you—if you send this cross to me, I shall know you want me to come, otherwise I solemnly promise you never to make the slightest attempt to see you. But will you write to me?"

Lucille, who had opened her eyes when he began to speak, looked at him. "I will," she said, faintly.

"You will always let me know where and how you are?" he continued. "I shall write to you—in a few days."

He would not admit the recollection that

this might be the last time he should ever see her, but with one kiss on her forehead he released her. For a moment, she made a gesture as if to detain him, but then her arms fell by her side, and she trembled so much that she sank on a chair, covering her face with her hands. The impulse was too strong—she again extended her hands, and caught his sleeve, looking up in his face with eyes full of despair. The thought was so terrible, that, after to-day, they in all probability would never be able to meet this side the grave. She had dreaded his coming ; now, she could not bear that he should go.

Sackville Vayning trembled visibly as that glance fell upon him. The devil which had been driven from his heart returned for a moment, with seven other devils, to renew the attack.

Oh, my brother—you who have never approached the edge of the precipice thus, and looked into the black, dizzy gulf beneath ; or you who have fought the good fight and conquered,—pray for those who enter into temptation, who stand on ground where one false step brings certain death !

"From all evil and mischief; from sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil; from Thy wrath, and from everlasting damnation,"—say, I beseech thee—"Good Lord, deliver us."

Full five minutes elapsed before Major Vayning spoke again.

"You will write to me?" he said, very tenderly, looking down at her.

"Yes."

"Then God bless you, my love, my darling!"

He kissed her soft scented hair, and her hands, almost as a brother might have done, and then, with a last "Farewell, my dear love!" he went away.

And the bird on the tree was still singing its joyous song, as he passed down the steps leading from Lady Anne's room into the sun-lighted garden.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TRILOGY.

THREE years.

What are they to look forward to ?

What are they to look back upon ?

A gulf, both ways—bridged only by hopes, fears, anticipations, recollections, sweet or bitter.

But God made the world for millions, not for units ; and God is over all, blessed and blessing for ever—a wise Father, not a cruel tyrant. Happily our lives do not cease at any point short of the grave. Even there, what we have done, for good or for evil, remains for all time, as a testimony for or against us. Let no one dare to think they may use their life as best pleases themselves. If we sport with life it is at our peril, as with children who sport with fire.

A room, flooded with golden morning light, the windows widely opened, looking out upon the loveliest vistas of the lovely scenery of Lugano,—a dainty, pretty room, filled with an atmosphere of purity and beauty and peace,—a room to be glad in, a room to weep in,—a room at the door of which almost visibly stands Death—Death arrayed in the white robes of an angel—Death, sweet and smiling, with shimmering pinions and violet eyes, and caressing hands and soundless footsteps,—the beautiful Azrael, who bears away the children, and those whose hearts are young and trustful, those who do not turn their longing gaze back to the world from which he leads them,—who does not strike, who woos in murmuring accents,—the kindest of the swift messengers of the Lord—Death, waiting for one of the purest, most obedient souls that ever came from the Creator of all. That young soul is ready to depart. Her eyes are not turned earthward, but raised to the blue skies, following the course of the floating clouds which drift across the ethereal expanse, with a celestial abstracted gaze, her hands linked loosely within each other upon her lap.

The noble figure of a man kneels by her, with bowed head concealed by the white drapery of the wrappers falling about her as she reclines in the great chair. Standing opposite, his sad, mournful eyes fixed upon her face, watching the rapid, delicate changes reflected therein as it were from heaven, is a gray-haired man. Sitting at a table is a young girl. Her tremulous accents alone break the profound silence of the room as she reads most sacred words of comfort—words too sacred to be lightly repeated.

Some moments passed, and the tremulous accents melted into tears. The slight form of the reader was shaken by sobs as she laid her face against the pages—sobs which were stifled lest they should disturb the last moments of the dying girl.

“My father, why does he not come?” murmured Margaret, her eyes turning from the skies to the road by which the carriage she watched for should arrive.

Her brother compressed the drapery enfolded in his hands against his lips. It was to be feared that, travel as he might, Rutherford Vayning would not be in time for the end

approaching so near. No one replied to the exclamation, and Margaret did not again speak. Her best beloved friend was denied the privilege of being near her. It was impossible—a cruel, bitter impossibility!

The sands fall with too fatal rapidity. A faint cry, a strange smile, a deep-drawn sigh, breathed out in the arms of her brother, and Sackville Vayning has lost one of the only two creatures on earth whom he loves.

A room—one of those grand old chambers to be found in the noble halls and manorial mansions of England. The yellow sunlight streams through the diamond panes of an immense mullioned window, catching lovely harmonies of colour from the many-quartered coats of arms. The floor is inlaid with a thousand quaint devices in richly tinted woods; the walls are concealed by curious old faded tapestry, worked by hands that have crumbled into dust centuries ago. The furniture is all of oak, carved in many an antique shape. The principal piece is an oak chest, nearly ten feet high, covered with figures and symbols, black with age. On one side the

chest stands a complete suit of armour, looking like a solemn sentinel; the helmet, closely barred and closed, seeming to cover some mysterious face. It is difficult to realize that this iron suit is empty. But its presence does not inspire fear. On the contrary, it seems as if this silent, immovable presentment of a warrior were the never-sleeping kindly guardian of the chamber. On either side the oak chest are two separate flights of steps, leading up into the chapel. Light streams down these steps into the room. A table is placed before the window—a large, perfectly square table, covered with thick cloth, matching the tapestry, and heaped with books, papers and parchments.

Slowly down the steps from the chapel descends a solitary female figure—Lucille, Baroness Devervil.

Grave, grand, and beautiful, her presence seems to light the ancestral chamber as the sun does. The soft rustle of her dress, like the sighing of the summer breeze, deepens the stillness. As she takes a seat before the table, one golden shaft of sunlight, penetrating through the crimson letters composing

the noble motto of her house, falls then upon her forehead, producing the strange effect of a diadem of rubies banded across her brow.

“Fide et Fortitudine”—the grand old motto which had been borne by a grand old house for eight centuries—blazoned on iron shields, embroidered on lace handkerchiefs,—splashed with life-blood in the battle-field, too often drenched with tears of agony in silk-lined chambers, but unchanged and beautiful through all.

The margin of a noble and exquisitely picturesque river, richly fringed with tall, majestic trees, many of which are laden with fruit. The banks are sloping and grassy on one side, almost perpendicular on the other. The light and feathery foliage of the date-palm and lofty palmyra, the dark evergreen branches of the cypress-like motsouri, the gigantic trunks and huge arms of the baobab, are raised against a perfectly cloudless sky, the intense burning blue of which is painfully dazzling. A grand silence pervades this region. The very animals—the elephant, the rhinoceros, the antelope—as they emerge at intervals with primeval

boldness from the thick-clustered trees and shrubs, and come down to drink at the water's edge, scarce break the stillness.

Suddenly a party, consisting of ten or twelve men, with a large waggon drawn by oxen, evidently an exploring party, comes from behind one of the enormous baobab trees, out upon the sloping, grassy bank of this splendid river. The leader is a man of perhaps forty years of age, dark, wiry in form, and with a peculiarly abstracted aspect. His companions, three or four in number, are men of various ages, all differing more or less in outward appearance, but all, undoubtedly, Englishmen. One of these is Major Vayning. The attendants are chiefly "natives"—long, lean, copper-coloured creatures.

CHAPTER XIV.

BARBARA WYNSTYN'S LOVER.

THE harvest moon was shining down in full radiance on the narrow, well-paved streets of Vienna, throwing some of the tall white houses into deep shadow, and others into bold relief. Nine o'clock was sounding from the steeple of St. Stephen's, of St. Peter's, and other churches, as a man, with a light summer overcoat covering his evening dress, crossed from the Graben to Stephan's Platz, and entered the Café Français. The blaze of gaslight revealed the handsome, if much-worn features of Tom Wynstyn. The person whom he had come to meet had not yet arrived, so he flung himself on one of the chairs, called for some coffee, and took up a paper to beguile the time while waiting.

Three years had visibly altered this man—for the worse. His face had lost its delicacy of outline. Gray hairs might be detected on his head, and in the still carefully trimmed moustache. The eyes retained their fire and their fascination of expression, their wonderful beauty; but they had an anxious, restless look—they seemed filled with suspicion, with doubt, with the reflection of a mind ill indeed at ease. Hard lines were traced round the mouth and in the cheek. Yet now, as always, he simply floated with the current of his life, such as it was—drifted with the tide, letting it bear him whither it listed—idly, idly.

During these three years, he had never heard from nor written to his wife, who, on her side, did not know where to seek him. He scarcely desired to learn anything of her—he scarcely knew whether she were living or dead, whether his child were living or dead. He had determined that he would never see either again; and if one day brought a wish to behold their faces once more, the feeling passed away with the dawn of the next morning. At times, he would have given much never to have seen the woman who was now

his wife, whom he had dragged down into ruin, into the blackness of darkness, into an abyss of despair, though even he did not dream how deep he had plunged her ; but he had a curious kind of love for her which made him fancy that it was best for her that they should remain apart.

In his selfish, careless, cruel way, it mattered nothing to him what anybody thought, or desired, or suffered, if a certain line of conduct suited his convenience. It suited him to drift about in his old strange fashion, and he troubled himself very little about having brought misery upon two unfortunate beings—beings unable to lift themselves from out the depth of misfortune into which he had precipitated them—his wife and his child : troubled himself no more than he had troubled about the love and sorrow of his widowed father, whose only child he was. He never troubled himself about the future, he never looked back to the past—what did it signify ? He made himself easy—he supposed his wife might do the same. Tom lighted a cigar, for every one around him was smoking, to such an extent that the place was enveloped in a thick cloud,

and waited with tolerable patience for some three-quarters of an hour. At last he began to evince decided signs of annoyance. He took out his watch over and over again, bit his lips, caught up the papers only to throw them back upon the table, even arose and walked towards the door, as if with the intention of departing, but altering his mind, returned to his seat.

He had made a second advance towards and retreat from the street, when a person who was apparently known to him, though not the one he waited for, approached from out the cloud of smoke, and walking towards his table, threw himself into the chair on the opposite side, with a careless salutation, which Tom as carelessly returned. Tom subdued all outward symptom of impatience, and looked profoundly at his ease as he rose for a moment to light another cigar at the lamp above him.

The new comer was indubitably a Frenchman, and by no means a favourable example of the manly beauty of his nation—a worn, jaded-looking personage of perhaps forty-five years of age, with keen rat-like eyes and close-clipped hair and beard—a Frenchified French-

man, in truth, dressed elaborately, with some taste, but just escaping the charge of caricaturing the fashions of Paris. The intonation of his voice was unpleasant; he had an irritating habit of raising his hands, eyebrows, and shoulders, to emphasize his remarks; and the dominant expression of his face was that of cold irony. The face was repellant in all ways, although far from being ugly or without good points; it seemed to betray a low, cowardly, vicious, sneering soul within—a soul incapable of pity, of sympathy, of the slightest aspiration beyond the dead level which it was pursuing. This man, the first brief greeting exchanged, glanced over some of the papers; then, throwing them aside, as a waiter approached with a tray, he looked up at Tom.

“Where is young Florence?” he asked, languidly, speaking in French. “I thought he was to be here? Did you not say he was to meet you here to-night?”

“Yes. I have been waiting for him. We made an appointment for nine. It is now a quarter past ten,” answered Tom.

“Diable!”

"I cannot conceive, why he has failed to keep his word."

There was a brief silence, which the Frenchman was the first to break. "If he does not come—what shall you do?"

"I? Can't say, not having considered the subject, my dear fellow."

Another silence. It was plain these men were not in the habit of speaking with freedom to each other.

"If we do not see him to-night," at last said the Frenchman, maintaining his affectation of carelessness, "we must give him up altogether, as he leaves for England on Friday. You remember he told us he was obliged to go because——"

"Because he has got into some sort of muddle with the Jews, and is obliged to make some small arrangements to hinder his situation from becoming known to somebody? I know it," gloomily answered Tom. "Why, do you think, has he failed us to-night?"

"Can't say, not having considered the subject. I fancy I know where to find him, if he is not at his rooms."

"Do you? Of course it is superfluous,

supposing him to be at home, because, if he were there——”

“He may not have broken his appointment from any desire to shirk his engagement, but may have simply been delayed. I’ll tell you where I think he is—at—talk of—h’m——” He was interrupted thus abruptly by the sudden entrance of the person of whom they were speaking.

A tall, thin, good-looking Englishman, of eight or nine and twenty, fair, with pale brown silky hair, small brown whiskers and moustache, and peculiarly white hands. He was not what would be ordinarily termed handsome, but he was aristocratic, and had a haughty, graceful way of carrying himself. His face was of a delicate waxy hue, and insipid in expression; his eyes were gray, and he was apparently near-sighted, for a glass dangled from a black cord passed round his neck; his features were fine in outline, the nose, lips and chin being especially models of beauty. His figure was elegant, but not strongly made. He was well dressed, but not the slightest signs and tokens told that he had any wish to play the man of fashion. Both

Tom and the Frenchman rose as this young man approached them; the former with an obvious air of ill humour, which he seemed determined not to conceal.

"So," Tom remarked, speaking in English, "allow me to compliment you on your excellent hours. Really, I think of moving a special vote of thanks to be returned to Mr. Florence for the admirable time he has kept, in honour of this present meeting, thereby showing a most excellent example."

"You must pardon me—I was detained," answered the young man, hurriedly. "My dear fellow, I should be glad to have a word or two with you, alone. I don't know what I shall do. I am in a most awful fix. I want to ask your advice. Can I see you alone before we go to—you know—for I suppose go I must?"

"There is very little doubt of that," replied Tom Wynstyn, coldly.

"Yes—yes, I suppose so. Then I must have a word or two with you."

"That is easily arranged. Meline can follow us—there is no necessity for him to favour us with his company on the way; in-

deed, that is an honour I could readily dispense with on 'most occasions. Meline, my good friend," he said, turning to the Frenchman, and addressing him in his own language, for this worthy did not understand one word of English, "we are going on to Kohlner's. There is no need to wait for you—you will be *there* almost as soon as we shall be, I imagine."

Meline replied by slightly elevating his eyebrows, and making scarcely perceptible gestures of assent with his angular shoulders and long lean hands to the proposed arrangement.

Tom and young Florence emerged from the *café* into the open street, where the moon was shining down in a flood of rich yellow light. "I have a message to leave at Daum's," said the young Englishman, hesitating for a moment outside the door of the house as they came out. "Dallas—I know you are my friend—I want your advice. I know nobody, so to say, in this city but yourself. I have plenty of acquaintances, but no other friend. I am very much afraid I am near being in a mess. I have told you how I am situated—I have told you that I— But, if you have

no objection to going into Daum's for two minutes, I will tell you exactly how I am situated—or, rather, how I fear being situated."

They turned towards the Kohlmarkt, and went to the *café* where the young man wished to leave his message, staying scarcely the two minutes stipulated for by Eugene Florence. Then they came out again.

The young man linked his arm within that of Tom as they came out once more into the lovely tranquil moonlight, and, as if by mutual assent, they walked towards the more quiet part of the city, passing through the crooked, narrow, carefully paved streets, lined with massive palaces, and palace-like houses, until they arrived at the quarter where are the palaces of the Schwartzembergs, Deitrichsteins, Lichtensteins, Harrachs, Stahrembergs, Colloredos, Esterhazys, Schönborns, Festetics, and Traetmansdorfs. Nothing could be more profound than the silence reigning in this region of ancestral shields and coronets, which they had selected as the place for their conference. The grand old buildings—before which were displayed antique escutcheons, dating from Rudolph of Hapsburg or Charle-

magne; above the roofs of which gleamed the golden fleece—rose with haughty pride against the purple blue cloudless sky, as if not deigning, from the altitude of their half-hidden stateliness, to take cognizance of aught that passed in their vicinity unless immediately concerning themselves.

For some time the two men walked in silence. Tom did not choose to speak—he was simply waiting until he had some further clue to the subject which was preoccupying the mind of his young friend. Eugene Florence was plunged in what seemed very painful reflections. He was the first to speak.

“It isn’t worth while to go to my rooms,” he said. “What I have to say will be soon said.” His voice trembled; his hand, as it rested on Tom Wynstyn’s arm, trembled; but of this he was not, to all appearance, conscious.

“I have already told you, Dallas. You are aware—that—— I don’t see why I should hesitate. You know that I am frightfully involved, that my affairs have all got into a perfect entanglement. I have been frank with you all along; for I like you, I trust you, and

I think I may say that you are really and truly my friend, although we have known each other so short a time." He did not pause for any reply, but went on : " Before I came over here, two months ago, I was already involved. About this time last year I met with—the girl to whom—who is to be my wife. A little while after we—after our engagement was formed—her uncle heard something—found out something about me, which had something to do with—— In fact, I had been playing desperately high, and there was a disturbance. He swore I should not have—his niece—this girl of whom I have told you—unless I faithfully promised never to touch a dice-box or a card again. I promised. I don't mind telling you that I would have promised anything rather than let my engagement be broken ; and, besides, I felt that I was going on too fast. It would not do. I felt that I should be totally ruined in a year if things went on at the rate they were going. I left London, thinking to get out of the way of those fellows who—those fellows you know with whom I used to meet. I spent some little time in Paris, where they—where they

have been living—I mean my betrothed and her uncle,—and I may say that I kept my word in letter and in spirit. Then I went about a good deal, here and there. At last, I came here, and I met with you and some other men, and I—well, I must confess I have been going at an awful rate. Well, he has heard something of what I have been doing, and he is here—I saw him to-night. He knows nothing for certain as yet, but if he discovers anything, nothing will induce him to overlook it. If he dreamt of my being involved as I am—good God! Imagine, Dallas—you know my affairs; I have kept nothing from you; I feel that you are my friend” (he pressed Tom’s arm half convulsively); “you know that I shall be obliged to go to London this very week to stop those scoundrelly Jews from— Look here, Dallas, I suppose it will be impossible to escape my appointment to-night? I feel as if I dared not touch a card while he is within the walls of the city.”

“In the first place, it will be utterly impossible for you to avoid your engagement for this night,” said Tom, coldly, yet with a

scarcely perceptible dash of kindness in his voice and manner, for he feared to chill his victim; "and in the second, there will be no danger whatever of your being seen by any one to whom it would be inadvisable to reveal the precise nature of your amusements."

"Amusements!" echoed Eugene Florence, with great bitterness. "There will be very little amusement for me to-night."

"May I ask," hesitatingly demanded Tom Wynstyn, "if the lady has money?"

"No—yes—I don't know—yes, I believe so—at least, I understand that her uncle will leave her his own property, which, I believe, is large; but I really know very little about it, although it was all explained to me. I don't care about what money she may have. I—it is herself. When our engagement was formed I had a splendid property—which is now—you know in what a wreck it is, Dallas. But to lose her——"

"Come, come, don't be foolish. Perhaps to-night you may amply replace your losses, which, it must be confessed, have been heavy. Your nerves have been a little unstrung. Old gentlemen are not unfrequently bores,

and meddle inconveniently with what does not concern them."

"You are speaking somewhat irrelevantly," interrupted Eugene Florence, with some irritation. "I don't deny him the right to guard the happiness of his niece—I would do as much in his place. But, on my side, of course, I must do everything I can to circumvent his schemes, and foil his plans. I acknowledge that I have done wrong in playing so deeply. For the future—after to-night—I swear I will never play again."

Tom had so often heard this kind of semi-remorseful language from the young man, that he thought it not worth notice. "When you go to London——"

"Don't speak of it. I feel as if—I don't know how I feel—desperately. My interview with Mr. Wynstyn——"

Tom caught his breath. He had to exercise the most powerful control over himself to avoid betraying his emotion at hearing this name; but he did master himself so far that only the slightest start evidenced that he was more than ordinarily interested in what young Florence was saying.

"I struck my foot against a piece of wood, or a stone, I think," he said, to account for his gesture. "Go on—I should suppose such a dialogue would—go on—I was about to ask you, if you intend to return to Vienna, when you have arranged your affairs in London?"

"I cannot say. I think not—well, I cannot be sure. I can think of nothing to-night. Let us turn back."

Tom wheeled round as if drawn by the light touch of the young man's hand, and they walked for some short way in almost painful silence. Tom was endeavouring to frame questions of a sufficiently vague nature not to arouse suspicion in Eugene Florence's mind, and yet sufficiently searching to draw forth such information as he wanted regarding the "Mr. Wynstyn" whom the latter had mentioned. By degrees he ascertained that it was of his own father that Eugene had been speaking, and that it was to a niece of the old man that Eugene was engaged—Barbara Wynstyn. He knew already that his father was living in Paris, partly for the sake of completing the education of his niece, partly because he wished to give her gayer, more

pleasant society, and more variety of amusement than he could obtain in London. It had been in Paris that they had met Eugene Florence, who became attached to Barbara, and asked her hand in marriage. He was a young man of handsome property. His parents had died while he was yet a child, but his estates had been committed to careful management, and he had been educated at a first-class public school, and from thence sent by his guardian to college. His habits were seemingly all that could be desired; there was no doubt that he was of excellent disposition; so Mr. Wynstyn, after some consideration, and making every inquiry regarding him—for the old man felt that Barbara was now his one ewe lamb, his darling, his child, really, and he cared more for marrying her happily than brilliantly, as he told Eugene Florence—had consented to the engagement. All the profound love which had been flung back by his son was concentrated and given to Barbara, who was everything to him—the joy of his heart, the delight of his eyes, the solace of his old age. Geoffrey Wynstyn felt that he could never forgive himself if, through any

blindness or carelessness of his, any misfortune came upon this darling. He felt himself bound by tenfold more responsibility than if he had been the father of Barbara. He felt that he must guard her happiness even more jealously, as it was upon his own responsibility that he had undertaken the charge of her and of her future. Of all these hopes and fears he had spoken to Eugene Florence. The engagement had existed some few months when he made a terrible discovery—that the young man had been entangled by some professional gamblers, by whom he had been led away. Eugene had never been particularly steady; but at school and at college, while giving the rein to his inclinations, he had always contrived to keep a fair front to the world. Once drawn within the whirlpool of temptation in London, he had yielded so rashly to the course of the current, that he had been carried far beyond his depth; he had lost heavily, he had gone on losing, and had then become involved in some bill transactions which showed dangerous symptoms of entailing ruinous mortgages. This was, so to speak, almost a fatal discovery. Mr.

Wynstyn had at once broken the engagement, and at first would not hear of its being renewed; but finally, Barbara's tears and entreaties, and Eugene Florence's promises, induced him to reconsider his verdict. It was sorely against his instinct of right, sorely against his presentiment that he was endangering the future peace of his Barbara, that Mr. Wynstyn consented to the re-engagement; and he declared that if Eugene transgressed a second time, if ever so slightly—if he even touched a card or a dice-box again, he and Barbara should part for ever.

“Rather, a thousand times, would I see my child dead at my feet than the wife of a gambler,” the old man had cried, passionately, with a vehemence very unlike his ordinary calm manner. “It is only from sheer pressure of circumstances that I yield now; but I do not scruple to swear before heaven—and I fancy you know me well enough to be aware that I do not take the vow lightly—I swear that if such a dereliction on your part occurs, nothing shall induce me to condone it. So, if you love my child, remember my words.”

Eugene Florence did love her whom the

old man called his "child." He had always been wayward, capricious, easily captivated by novelty, and easily wearied by acquaintance, but this love which he had for Barbara seemed to promise to steady him for life, if nothing came to cross it. It is useless to try by argument or any species of analogy, to fathom the reasons why he had been so mad as to risk losing her—the fact remains that, for two months, he had not only been haunting some of the most desperate gambling resorts, but had permitted Dallas and Meline to assemble parties in his own rooms, two or three times a week, for the avowed purpose of playing almost recklessly. Of course he was ignorant that the men composing these parties were all, or nearly all, professional gamblers; for Tom, who had formerly gambled more from evil propensities than with the object of making anything by it, had now sunk to the level of those harpies who exist by practices sometimes too black to bear the light of day, or the eyes of honest men. Idle, whimsical, careless, selfish, Tom had always been, but he was merely a commonplace villain; he had no wish to defraud living soul of a farthing, and

he had not unfrequently, in his rare moments of thought, reviled himself for the baseness of preying thus, vulture-like—for feeding on carrion. . Even when most indifferent, he could only have satisfied his conscience by an ironical, bitter “What does it matter?”

For all his utter coldness, his real dislike to being bored by hearing people talk about themselves, Tom was gifted (fatally, he himself sometimes imagined) with a faculty for extracting confidence. Young men, especially, insisted on nearly constituting him their father confessor, and often continued to confide in him even when he had administered some tolerably strong hints of his repugnance to the office. They entrusted him with confidences even which men ordinarily withhold from one another. More than once, more than twice, he had gained devoted friendship—the friendship of those whose bitterest, cruelest enemy he was. As he had gained the warm affection of Gustave de Lagny Charteris, which he had lost only at the last hour of the unfortunate young man’s earthly existence; now he had gained the entire friendship and confidence of Eugene Florence—without wish-

ing for it, without asking for it. What did he care for the woes or the joys, the hopes or the fears of this young Englishman?—nothing; he cared not a jot for the thought that when they should separate within the month, they would never meet again. But he had a habit of listening with silent attention, which passed for profound interest, and those magical eyes of his lightened or clouded (it seemed to himself mechanically) at various stages of his interlocutor's narrative or confidence, and he always had a quick reply ready, and he looked deceitful sympathy even when he was cursing his hard fate at being obliged to hearken to what he did not care a straw about. He wanted the confidence of nobody, he wanted the love of nobody; and love, confidence, and friendship were flung lavishly into his ungrateful hands.

They walked for some time, through one crowded busy street after another, on leaving the grand old quarter whither they had wandered to speak privately.

"You see, I have gone on day after day," at last resumed Eugene Florence. "I don't know why I have been so mad. I feel in a

most awful state of mind. I don't deny I have been wrong—I have broken my word, too. But I don't want to talk moral about that. If old Wynstyn finds out, you know, it will be all over as regards Barbara. And if that happens——” For a moment he looked half wildly about him. “I could not lose her. I could lose anything and everything, but not her. You know how I feel about this, because I have told you.”

“You quit Vienna on Friday next—this is Wednesday. There can be no danger. There can be no danger,” repeated Tom, as if to reassure himself by the iteration—“no danger whatever. How could——” he hesitated—“how could he find out—how could he learn anything of your—your resorts? Where could he learn anything about you? It is impossible that he could know anything of what you are doing.”

“Why should he be unable to do in Vienna what he did in London?” hastily demanded Florence. “I have not the most distant idea of how he learnt anything about me during the spring, when I got entangled with those cursed Jew fellows. I don't know to

this hour how he discovered what was going on."

"Where there's a will, there's a way. If people do not scruple as to means, they can learn anything they choose to learn. Spies are like vermin, and will crawl anywhere; the only difference is, that vermin are honest, and don't ask to be paid for blood-sucking, and don't tell tales."

"That's just the thing," exclaimed Eugene Florence, with a hasty gesture. "You simply echo my own thoughts. What he could do in one capital, he can certainly do in another. I swear that if I can only get out of this place undetected, I will never touch a card again."

"Undetected!' What a word for a free and independent Milord to use."

"The word escaped me unawares. It has rather a thief-in-the-night or small-delinquent-school-boy sort of sound, I acknowledge. But as for being free and independent, you are surely speaking ironically in terming me such. Never was poor devil run into such a corner as I am."

"I must confess I do not see things from your standpoint. Your interview of this

evening has unsettled your nerves, and you are building up ghosts as your English country bumpkins are said to do, with a sheet, a stick, and a lantern. Did your friend bring any charge against you this evening—did he talk moral, and take you to task?”

“No—yes—no. Well, he said—he said that he had come here, because somebody had told him that I had suffered a slight relapse.”

“And you——”

“Denied everything, of course. If he has nothing but vague surmises to go on, as to my doings for the last two months, I am safe. But the ides of March have not passed—I may yet make a false step, and I have an indefinable presentiment that to-night——”

“That presentiment is partly induced by the depression of spirits to which you have yielded, and is partly due to the fact that you are conscious of the vicinage of your respected friend. However, though you might walk round the walls within an hour, one might easily play the juvenile game of hide and seek within the city gates of Vienna.”

“There is nothing to be done by talking—let us make haste,” said Eugene, moodily.

Tom did not answer, but quickened his steps, and in a few minutes they were in the *Karnthnerstrasse*. Not another word was exchanged between them, even when they turned into one of the most fashionable confectioner's shops in the street, above which hung one of those well-painted signs for which Vienna is famous. Eugene loosened his hand from Tom's arm, and drew back, to follow him.

The shop was glittering with light and colour, and was splendidly decorated, quite in Parisian style, for the owner was a Frenchman. Looking-glasses, beautifully designed lamps, gilding, carving, fragile examples of every imaginable and unimaginable variety of the bonbon species, with accompanying boxes, glasses, fanciful papers, made the place sparkle like the grotto of an enchanter. There were some few loungers in the shop, although it was so late in the evening; but Tom and his friend did not stay, passing through quickly until they reached the extreme end. A young woman was sitting here, engaged in some very light knitting or something of that kind, with bright silks on her lap, half in half

out of the pockets of her silk apron. She looked up for an instant as the two gentlemen approached, and a scarcely perceptible glance of recognition flashed from her eyes as she looked at Tom. There was a door a little to her right hand, leading upstairs, but Tom stopped before a long sheet of looking-glass, and touched one of the many gilded knobs surrounding it. The huge mirror receded into the panelling at the side, revealing a narrow flight of steps, well lighted by a lamp which was fixed overhead, shaded by a ground-glass globe. Both men passed through, and Tom pushed the door back into its place, "clicking" it to ascertain that it was fastened. These steps conducted them up to the first set of rooms. A door facing them was closed, but Tom pushed this open, and they were in a lofty, somewhat meagrely furnished antechamber, which led in its turn to another room, the door of which was closed as the two other doors had been.

On opening this last door, they found themselves in a moderately large, lofty apartment, furnished more after the Parisian than the Viennese mode. A party of about eight or

ten persons, all men, were here assembled, some lounging about; some talking, two or three playing cards. The room was flooded with light, by means of wax candles, and pervaded by an atmosphere of great luxury and comfort. With the exception of those few who were playing, these men all had the aspect of people who were *waiting* for something—and although they did not greet Tom or Eugene Florence with anything of eagerness, it was evident that it had been for them that they had waited.

It was easy to detect, even without hearing each individual speak, that it was a decidedly mixed assemblage. Their ages ranged, for the major part, between thirty and forty, the exception being a couple of young Austrian officers and two Frenchmen, the men who were playing. The oldest man in the room was a tall, stout, tolerably good-looking personage, undoubtedly an American, who had a square-cut soft brown beard, and eyes of the palest shade of slaty gray. He was lounging in a fauteuil, his legs indolently stretched out, caressing his beard with a fat white hand, whereon sparkled half a dozen rings of

some value, and listening to, rather than joining in, the conversation of two or three men who were standing close beside him. One of these men was remarkably handsome, and seemed by his accent to be a Spaniard; another was a red-bearded Russian; another was a long-whiskered Irishman, gifted with the impudence, volubility, and liveliness of his nation. Two men were overlooking the table where the four young men were playing—two Englishmen,—one about thirty, only less handsome than the tall Spaniard, with a pointed moustache and a peaked beard, and a pleasant expression in his face; the other, perhaps seven or eight years older, a man looking like “a broken-down swell,” prematurely aged, his light hair and whiskers already grizzled, terrible lines traced about his eyes and mouth by care and vice, ready to be deepened by the industrious graver of Time. Every one in the room turned as the new comers entered. Some advanced and shook hands with them, others glanced up and nodded. The players were those who exchanged the most cavalier greeting, resuming their game the instant after.

Tom's first care was to surround Eugene Florence with the most cheerful, agreeable men in the room; his next, to make him drink freely of Rhenish wine and Moët until his spirits rose in exact proportion as they had been depressed. Tom himself abstained always from indulging in any kind of intoxicating liquid, as much from want of inclination as from prudential motives. He would not let Eugene Florence even sit down until, between talking and drinking, he was in a perfect ferment of excitement. Presently the Austrian officers and their friends finished their game, and rising from the table whereat they had been seated, joined the group surrounding Tom Dallas and Florence. They were, apparently, Eugene's friends, these men; for they were on terms of the slightest possible intimacy with Tom. Just as Tom was managing that, seemingly of his own accord, Florence should propose to play, Meline entered the room. The scene was an exact repetition of the scene which had taken place, either here or elsewhere, almost every night of the two months which Eugene Florence had spent in Vienna. He was an easy prey to the men with whom

he was playing: they did not need to use any unfair means to entrap him, for one and all were possessed of paramount skill—in fact, what they were doing now was the profession by which the greater number of them lived, and he was, if a tolerably good, certainly not a pre-eminently practised hand. They managed the games as they might have done with a child, now letting him win, again making him lose, more or less heavily, always without exciting the least suspicion in his mind. To-night, however, it had been agreed, he must be treated a little differently from the way in which he had been used, and Tom did not hesitate to resolve on an extreme measure in case of necessity.

The two young officers looked on for some time, without returning to the table where they had been playing. Three-quarters of an hour, perhaps, elapsed, when one made a sign to the other, and they both retired to the extreme end of the somewhat circumscribed room.

“For the last fortnight, I have had a strange kind of feeling towards that man—that Dallas,” said the one who had made the

sign. "I have not been able to detect him in anything even approaching foul play; but I cannot dismiss from my mind the idea that it would be as well if Florence did not place such reliance on his honour. I can hardly tell you how I have arrived at this opinion, Alvinczi, but I most strongly distrust that man."

Alvinczi looked at his friend. "I have had the same notion," he said, speaking in a low tone. "Yet there is nothing, as far as I can see, to justify one in having such a suspicion. Have you said anything to Florence?"

"No. How could I? I know very little of him, after all; and it would be a fine thing to make an allegation without having the slightest proof to support it. And what allegation could we make? Let Florence take his chance. He is not a child. If he chooses to be led away, it is his fault—his affair. Yet I don't like to stand by, fancying I see something wrong going on without being able to satisfy myself one way or the other. It is like being alarmed by sounds of which one cannot trace the cause."

"We must admit it would be only absurd

to talk of honour or honesty among a set of fellows like these. Of course, it is very well for you and me, who are perfectly aware of what we are doing, and know with whom we play—we never play with anybody we don't know; and although De Bonnard and Armand are by no means paragons of virtue and morality, there is not much harm in them, especially when they are well looked after—but for a fool like that Florence, who is half blind mentally as he is physically, it is the height of madness to let himself get within the clutches of these people.”

The two young men returned to the table, where they continued, by tacit agreement, to watch Tom Dallas's manoeuvres, utterly failing, however, to detect him in any turn which was not strictly fair and legitimate. Two or three hours passed over, and they were still playing. Eugene Florence had almost alternately lost and won, but his losses were greater than his winnings. From having been perfectly depressed, he became painfully exhilarated; it was scarcely necessary for those in conspiracy against him to keep him well supplied with wine, for if it were not given to him, he called

for some. It began to be evident that they could not stay here much longer, for night had merged into morning. At the same time, Eugene Florence was on the point of departing for an indefinite period, what was to be done must be done *now*, or there might not be another opportunity. Tom made no observation whatever, but it was so contrived that the young man himself should propose going to his own rooms, and finishing the night's work.

Proposed by Eugene, and agreed to with seeming reluctance by Meline, Tom Dallas, the Spaniard, and one or two others, the motion was carried. The young officers also joined the party, asked by Eugene Florence, greatly to the secret annoyance of the others. They were soon at the house where Eugene Florence resided—one of the best houses in the Graben. The gates, like those of most houses in Vienna, were closed at ten o'clock, but the *hausmeister*, or porter, never raised the slightest objection to admitting the young Englishman or his friends at any hour, for he was generally rewarded largely beyond the customary eight or ten kreutzers.

The suite of rooms which Eugene Florence occupied were in nowise different from the ordinary run of apartments of a similar style and stamp. A small antechamber led to the sitting-room, which was of fine proportions, lofty, and furnished after the comparatively meagre fashion prevalent in middle-class houses in the city. The walls were covered with a paper of a pale gray colour, which threw into relief two or three moderately good pictures. The apartment was glittering with the brilliancy of looking-glasses and mirrors, which gleamed and reflected light from one to another in every direction. Opposite to the entrance, upon the wall, was a handsome stand of arms, forming the most remarkable feature in the place. The floor was highly waxed. The windows were draped, although curtainless. The chairs and sofas were muffled in chintz-coloured calico envelopes, which concealed the satin coverings. Eugene Florence's servant lighted candles, which were placed ready for use in a splendid chandelier of cut-glass depending from the ceiling ; and, at his master's order, brought in wine. Then the real work for which the conspirators had met began.

Tom, who was in point of fact the chief of this band, found that he must put into execution the nefarious scheme which he had meditated employing only in case of urgent necessity. They made comparatively little way, and he fancied he could manage his plan with safety. He cordially wished that the two officers had not taken it into their heads to join the party, and had a kind of instinctive feeling that they were following his movements with more than common interest. He sat facing Eugene Florence, whose back was towards the doorway. Suddenly Tom Wynstyn looked up, and uttered a faint cry, either of surprise or of alarm.

Standing, mortally pale, holding aside the heavy drapery which supplied the place of a door, looking like a figure by Rembrandt against the black background, was his father, gazing steadily upon the scene. How long he had been there, Tom did not, could not guess. No one had noticed him. Tom's hand fell nervelessly upon the table, the cards dropped from his clasp in his fear and surprise, their faces upwards. At the same instant, a card slipped from his sleeve, and would have

fluttered to the ground had not Alvinczi, one of the young officers, caught it. Eugene Florence, following the fixed glance of Tom, turned round, and the cards also dropped from his fingers, as he rose, overturning his chair.

The others, seeing that something was amiss, but ignorant of the signification of this unexpected advent, looked from one to another. The first idea was, that either Dallas or Florence had committed some crime, and that this meant an arrest; the second, that this man was the father of one or of the other. Geoffrey Wynstyn did not move from his place, he did not even relax his hold of the *portier*, but kept his eyes fastened upon his son and the betrothed of his "child." Alvinczi did not stir, but waited until some one of the three mute actors in this little scene should afford some explanation of what was at present a mystery.

Tom Wynstyn averted his eyes for a moment from the silent apparition holding back the drapery hanging over the doorway. As he shifted his gaze, he caught sight of Alvinczi, who still retained the card, the ace of hearts, which had fallen from his—Tom

Wynstyn's—sleeve. He sank back on the chair from which he had risen, and flinging his arms on the table, bent his head upon them. He felt as if death itself were at hand—he wished it were death instead of this. For a moment, all eyes were drawn towards him; even Eugene Florence looked at him wonderingly, in spite of his own horrid sensations. When they looked up again, Geoffrey Wynstyn had disappeared.

Alvinczi crossed the room, and went up close to Eugene. "What is the meaning of this?" he asked. "What has happened? What is the matter?"

"Ruin—misery," replied Eugene. There was no mistaking the expression of his face—the reality of his tone, which indicated suffering far beyond the power of words to reveal.

"Do you know what this man yonder has been about?" demanded Alvinczi.

"No—what?" Eugene passed his hand across his forehead, to clear away the mists in which his mind was enveloped.

Alvinczi showed him the card—the fatal ace of hearts.

"This dropped from his sleeve, and I picked

it up. They have been plundering you. I feared so, but could bring no proof, no reason to justify my suspicions."

Eugene Florence took the card from him, looked at it for a minute or two mechanically, as if his thoughts were far away and he was unable to appreciate the significance of the information which his friend had given him. Suddenly his countenance changed, like that of a deaf person who has not heard for a moment or two something spoken, and he stepped over to Tom, who raised his head and sprang to his feet as he approached. Eugene pushed aside the table with such violence that it fairly turned over and fell with a crash on the polished floor. There was no need for any explanation. For about three minutes these two men—Tom Wynstyn and Eugene Florence—gazed steadily in each other's eyes, and understood each other better than if they had exchanged reproaches or recriminations for three hours. Then Eugene slowly tore the card into fifty pieces, and dashed the light paper shower full in Tom's face, following this action by an abrupt insulting blow with the back of his hand across the chest.

Tom stepped back, and grew pale as death ; then he returned with interest the blow which had been dealt him. Then there was a confused scuffle, a sound of threats and curses, a jingling of broken glass, the trampling of feet, the dull noise of blows given with vehement force ; and then the two combatants, Tom Wynstyn and Eugene Florence, were dragged away from one another, as people separate dogs who have been quarrelling.

Eugene was flushed. Tom could not have grown paler than he was now ; but both men were heated with their unseemly fight.

"Gentlemen," cried some one, "this is disgusting—indecent. It is like a brawl among midnight roisterers in a beerhouse. For shame, gentlemen, for shame !"

"This must be settled now and for ever," cried Eugene Florence, in a voice sounding so calm and decided as to be an extraordinary contradiction to his excited face and manner.

"No—no—no ! You are mad !" cried the others. Tom, still hemmed in by three or four, maintained a dogged silence, and remained impassive. "To-morrow—to morrow !"

"Now, I say," cried Eugene, savagely—"now."

"But how?" demanded one of the young officers, laying a grip on his arm to command attention. "What do you mean?"

"Let us have the swords," said he, pointing to the rapiers placed across at one section of the stand of arms on the wall. "Let us have the swords, and you will soon see what I mean."

"You are mad! Good heavens!—do you know what you are talking about?" exclaimed Alvinci.

He persisted. Tom simply waited to see what would be done, having fallen into a strange kind of carelessness as to what might happen, and willing to do whatever he might be told to do. Stunned by two strokes so unexpectedly as to be for the moment reduced to a state of total incapacity of thought—stunned as completely by the mental shocks as he might have been by physical, Eugene Florence persisted fiercely, vindictively in his demand. Some were for, some against gratifying him, and, at last, somehow, he gained his desire. All present were, more or less,

under the influence of wine and the worst form of excitement, and consequently largely reckless of consequences. They scarcely paused to wonder why no one had taken any notice of the falling of the table, and the subsequent struggle which had ensued between the two antagonists. Perhaps Tom was the only one to whom it occurred to think of this, and his mind dwelt on it for an instant with that strange inconsistency which leads the brain to present subjects of the most unimportant nature at a juncture when it would seem more likely that it would be preoccupied with the danger of the moment. He remembered that the rooms on the first floor, beneath, were rented by these very Austrian officers who were now present; and that a deaf old lady lived on the floor above; and that not infrequently, when more noise had been made in this apartment before to-night than was either right or proper, the hausmeister had been tipped pretty liberally, with the view of inducing him to abstain from taking notice unless absolutely obliged to hear and see.

Tom accepted mechanically the weapon which was placed in his hand, and his eyes

flashed at Eugene Florence. He was on the defensive, that he felt ; he had not the least wish to do more than guard himself. There was something almost philosophic in the large allowance which he made for the savage resentment of the young man who faced him, thirsting for vengeance—vengeance for wrongs which none knew better than himself were too deep even to be washed out in blood.

The by-standers stepped aside, to let them have it out. The swords crossed, emitting sparks of fire, and then kept on leaping and twisting like steel snakes, and nothing was heard but the clashing of the weapons and the hurried breathing of the combatants. Tom found that he had to exert his utmost skill, which, after all, was not to be compared to that of Eugene Florence, who was an unusually practised swordsman.

It seemed seconds to the actors, hours to the lookers-on, in this scene before the crisis came, before the first few scratches showed that it was something besides a passage at arms. Eugene Florence made some passes too rapid for the eye to follow them, and Tom dropped the point of his sword, and staggered

back with a faint groan into the arms of one or two of the men standing near him.

The point of Eugene's sword likewise fell, as he saw that he had at last seriously touched his antagonist. He stood there, looking at Tom, with an expression on his face which it would have been impossible to define.

Tom closed his eyes ; some one took his weapon from his hand, and he pressed his side, while his features contracted. His lips were dyed by a crimson tide of life-blood, and he vainly attempted to gasp out some words as his friends carried him to a sofa. He never opened his eyes again ; he never uttered a sound after those horrid gasping efforts ; and in five or ten minutes Tom Wynstyn lay dead. That cold, selfish, cruel heart had ceased to beat ; that careless, deceitful tongue was silent ; those wicked eyes were closed upon this world for ever. Gustave de Lagny Charteris was avenged, and an old man's misery was deepened into the blackness of darkness, and an innocent girl was shipwrecked, stranded without hope on a pitiless rock, around and beyond which surged the cold gray sea.

Oh, well for you and for me, my brother,

that we can, with tolerably easy consciences, and with a Samaritan consideration for the shortcomings of our neighbours, kneel down and cry, "May God have mercy upon Us, Miserable Sinners."

CHAPTER XV.

A CAGED HEART.

LUCILLE sat alone in Lady Anne's room, half lying on a couch drawn near to the fire, a book upon her lap, open, but unread. She knew now that she was in reality widowed, for after that terrible scene in the house in the Graben, Geoffrey Wynstyn had despatched a hasty telegram, telling her of the fact. Since then, for three months, she had had no further communications, beyond a few hurried lines written at long intervals. Geoffrey Wynstyn had been trying to find and to bring to justice the man who had killed his son.

Barbara was staying at Holme Priory. Poor Barbara! Poor Barbara, who had been so light-hearted, so happy, in the days which

seemed now so far, far away—bright days, which seemed now so much brighter by reason of the darkness of the days which had succeeded them. Poor Barbara! One could offer sympathy to poor little Barbara, which it would be impossible to even look in presence of the Baroness Deveril.

Geoffrey Wynstyn had left her in Paris, with the lady who was her companion and, to a certain extent, governess. In his hurried letters to Lucille, after the events of that night when he had stood at the door of Eugene Florence's room, in Vienna, he had mentioned to her that he had left Barbara alone in Paris. Lucille went at once to her friend. Barbara had been very quiet. She knew perfectly well that to hope was impossible, and she obeyed Lucille as a child might have done. There had been a painful scene between the two women on Lucille's arrival. Suffering had made them akin. Lucille, kneeling by the great easy-chair in which the poor girl lay, trying to comfort her, poured out, prompted by some sudden inspiration, the story of which Barbara knew scarcely anything—the terrible story

of her blighted life. Barbara had listened spell-bound to the passionate flood of words. Lucille spoke so fast that it was sometimes hard to follow her sentences, but Barbara never interrupted her, never uttered a remark, simply listened with her eyes fixed intently on the face which was upturned to hers, now looking at her, again averted, now white, again flushed. And Lucille had brought Barbara back with her to Holme Priory, where she had been staying ever since, while Geoffrey Wynstyn was seeking to find the man who had killed his son.

Everything had gone on with outward quietness since she had settled down at Lyndon Holme. Barbara had done nothing, although she had asked rather anxiously to be allowed to share some of the work in which Lucille was always so deeply engaged; but her health was giving way, and one of the most eminent physicians in London had come down, at Lucille's instance, to see her, and had expressly ordered that for months she was to ride constantly, and keep as much as possible in the open air. She wished to be permitted to sometimes visit the poor people to whom

Lucille was so good, of whom and for whom Lucille thought and did so much; but the great London physician had ordered absolute quiet, and Lucille determined that he should be obeyed implicitly.

She was out now, riding, with little Marie, when Lucille was sitting before the fire. Lucille was gazing, her eyes half closed, upon the pictures glowing on the hearth. She did not often let her thoughts ramble; but sometimes, when everything was perfectly silent around her, and she was sitting idly thus, she could not rein them in. The expression on her face was difficult to understand as her thoughts would have been if put into words.

She was not dressed in the weeds of a widow. The fact that her husband had not gone down in the *Esmeralda* had never become known to the world at large, and for her child's sake, if not for her own, she did not desire now to publish it. When she had first received the telegram from Geoffrey Wynstyn announcing the death of his son, a painful shock of joy had passed through her heart, like the stroke of a sharp knife.

She had prayed that she might not feel glad. It seemed wicked to her to rejoice, to have this horrid sensation of something which was so closely akin to joy that it was impossible to call it by any other name. She felt as if she deserved to be punished, doubly punished, for another poor creature was suffering a life-long grief from the means by which she had been released. She felt like a person who has wakened from some fearful, hideous nightmare to a cold and cruel reality—the weight of terror was lifted from her heart and brain, but the feeling that rest was very far away remained. Yet it is hard to put self completely on one side, and to feel as acutely for the sufferings of others as we do for our own; and although she remembered every day the unhappy father, and the pale girl whose cup of happiness had been dashed from her lips, the temptation of regarding her own future was too great to be resisted. It is sublime to suffer and be strong, but oftentimes suffering brings its own strength; there is a sublimity in suffering which ennobles the one who bears its burden. But it is sometimes difficult to rejoice and be

strong. Suffering is seldom dashed with joy : joy is almost invariably shadowed.

This afternoon she was plunged in dreamy reveries, blaming herself bitterly at intervals for thus losing herself, and trying to drag herself from them. How cold and cruel she must be to think of herself, or even—or even of Sackville at this time ! Yes, she called herself hard names, and then lost herself again. It was almost like a person trying to keep awake, and to sympathize with the griefs of others, and yet falling asleep, and gliding into pleasant dreams—floating away into unexplored regions, where was peace, and green trees, and blue skies, and the twittering of birds ; away from darkness and blackness, and war, and pain, and care. Geoffrey Wynstyn was expected home some day this week—what day, was uncertain, as, in writing, he had not fixed the precise date of his purposed arrival. Barbara had declared that she had a presentiment that he would come to-day, but when she expressed a wish to stay at home, Lucille had insisted upon her going out and taking Marie. So Lucille was alone, by the fire, trying to maintain a fiction to herself

that she was reading, although the book which she had taken was lying on her lap. One may reverse the old Latin saying, "*Ad nullum consurgit opus, cum corpore languet*;"—when the mind is languid, the body cannot be roused to labour. Lucille would have found it impossible to tell how long she had been alone, when her meditations were broken in upon by the entrance of a servant.

"Mr. Wynstyn has just arrived, my lady."

Lucille sprang to her feet.

"Ask him to come here. Where is he?"

"In the blue drawing-room, my lady."

"I will come to him. No, ask him to come here."

The servant left the room, and presently Mr. Wynstyn came. The two or three months which had elapsed since the death of his son had wrought a greater change than the two or three past years. His face was wrinkled and wan, his figure was bent, he leant heavily on a stick—he, who had up to that time been as alert as a man of thirty. The door had been left half open, at Lucille's desire, therefore she heard his step as he approached along the corridor, and ran to meet him. He

extended both his hands to her, and she threw herself into his arms. For some moments neither spoke. The mute sympathy sufficed, without words.

"My father," said Lucille, at last, raising her head, and looking at him. She was shocked to behold the alteration in him. He pressed her again, kissed her forehead, and then released her, and they sat down opposite to each other by the fire. Geoffrey Wynstyn began to speak, quite abruptly, as if resuming instead of commencing a conversation.

"I could not succeed in tracing him. I knew that he had not escaped from Vienna, but could not discover him. At the end of six weeks, I learnt that he had quitted the city. He had been all the while concealed by the porter of the house where he lived. There is no justice in heaven or on earth. My son's blood cries from the ground for vengeance. His murderer is at large. Not even to you, my child, can I reveal the dark and bitter thoughts which fill my heart."

He buried his face in his hands. Lucille did not speak—she could not command her voice, indeed,—but she placed her little, soft,

sympathetic fingers upon the clasped hands of the old man. He closed his hands upon them, without looking up. At last he raised his head, unclasped his hands, and bent his gaze upon the fire.

"Yes, you are right," he said, replying to her eloquent touch. "It is wrong, it is wicked, to talk thus. It has now passed from my power. I could not reach him. It rests with God. His will be done. It is very, very hard to say so, but— I have not yet shed one tear over the fate of my poor boy," he said, suddenly changing his tone, and looking at Lucille. "I cannot—it seems to me as if such a thing could not be as that he is dead. I keep repeating to myself the dreadful fact, but I cannot realize it. I cannot realize it."

Lucille felt herself cold and cruel in that she could not comfort this poor father as she felt he ought to be comforted. Her words seemed hard and formal in her own ears. But it did not matter. In his great grief, Geoffrey Wynstyn scarcely heeded what was said to him by others; the echoes in his heart drowned all outer sounds. The two continued to talk in low accents for about an hour; then Barbara and Marie came home.

After that day, Geoffrey Wynstyn fell into the ordinary routine of life, determined as far as he could to "let the dead past bury its dead," and to devote himself to poor little Barbara, who needed all his care.

A week flitted by, a month, two months, and the bright and beautiful spring was come, capricious, lovely in its freshness and promise. Lucille reproached herself that her heart seemed to expand as the sunlight and the flowers did—that she could not help echoing the delicious trilling of the birds sometimes. Was it wrong? The world moves on: yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow are different, yet the same. Was it wrong, that she caught herself sometimes smiling at the beauty which was reflected back to her from mirrors and looking-glasses, a beauty still youthful and fresh, despite her many sorrows and her thirty years? Was it wrong to rejoice that her chains, self-forged though they had been, were broken, and that she was free once more? Every day she looked for letters; every day she eagerly scanned the newspapers for some intelligence regarding the Expedition to Central South Africa which Major Vayning had joined.

But no letters came, the newspapers were silent on the one point whereon she consulted them. But why should she feel anxious? She never spoke to any one about the Expedition, nor mentioned Major Vayning's name: she could not. But she assured herself that there was no cause for anxiety. Every reason for the non-arrival of a letter which could be suggested by human ingenuity she consoled herself with. It was easy to divine why the newspapers and scientific journals were silent—there was nothing to be told. It was childish to wonder and forebode; it was foolish impatience.

Another month, and still that deadly silence. There was nothing to be done but wait—wait. And then waiting began to make her heart sick, with sickness and faintness far surpassing any bodily suffering from hunger or thirst. This pain was rendered more poignant because there was no one to whom she could confide her forebodings, her secret fears. Almost as a rule, men dislike having a confidant, and when they are obliged to elect one, it is to a woman they fly; but women, almost without exception, seem, from some necessity of their

nature, to be unable to restrain their joys and sorrows exclusively within their own hearts.

The crocuses and snowdrops were replaced by violets and anemones, which in their turn were supplanted by roses and carnations, until all nature was in the joyous flush of her June loveliness. The summer was unusually radiant; the fields, the gardens, the skies, the water, seemed to join in one universal jubilation.

From the darkened prison of that deadly silence which appalled her, from out the bars of her own sad thoughts and fears, Lucille gazed upon the sunny world around her, and tried to find peace in sympathizing with others. But this, which would have been well had she been at ease one way or the other, was of little effect now. For many reasons, she had been obliged to yield to the advances of her neighbours, and to respond to the courtesies which they showed her; and although she uniformly refused to join in any festivities, she did not decline to make visits of ordinary ceremony, or even sometimes of a more cordial kind, and she not infrequently invited some of these persons, for whom she cared nothing,

to stay at her house. So, finding that she was willing to go certain lengths, people professed to admire her, and to pity the grief which had fallen upon her. Many snares matrimonial were spread for the young, wealthy, beautiful widow, in vain.

At the end of June, the young Marchioness Carluthen, with her husband and children, had arranged to come for a visit of some six or seven weeks. Lucille looked forward to this visit with a longing indescribable. Ettie knew of the engagement which had existed between her and Major Vayning, as she knew of the reason why it had been dissolved, and Lucille could pour out her hopes and fears with the confidence of being understood, and of receiving some comfort. So eagerly did she look for the coming of Ettie, that she began to count the days that must elapse before Ettie's advent. She even wrote to Ettie once or twice, begging her not to let anything, if possible, hinder her from coming.

At last the young marchioness arrived. She came comparatively early in the afternoon—about twelve or one o'clock, and Lucille had been so busy all the morning that she had

neglected her ordinarily invariable custom of scanning the papers. She could not delegate to any one the supervision of the suite of apartments destined for Ettie, and flitted from room to room to see that everything was as perfectly arranged as could be. Ettie was delighted to see her friend. They had not met for some years now. Ettie had been abroad a great deal, and Lucille had scarcely quitted her home since she had first settled at Holme Priory.

It was with pardonable maternal pride that the young marchioness introduced her children to Lucille—the little Lord Netherclift and his sister, the Lady Virginia Carstone. Two more lovely little rosebuds could not have been found anywhere. The boy was a splendid little fellow, manly, handsome, and, encouraged by his father, a perfect baby dare-devil with horses and dogs; but *sans reproche* when with his mother, and specially with his sister, towards whom he played the part of “big brother” with comical dignity. Virginia was like a picture by Reynolds or Correggio. A round, rosy, innocent face, the component features of which appeared to be two great, soft,

brilliant, violet eyes, dimples, and rose petals. A child all life, light, fire, guileless beauty—sparkling like a diamond or a dewdrop in the sunlight;—a child for whom one trembled, in the midst of admiration, lest she should either die young, or grow into a self-engrossed coquette; a child whom the wisest would have been tempted to aid in spoiling; an exquisite vignette illustration to M. de Lamartine's text, "La plus belle des coquetteries c'est l'innocence."

The day passed over as such days are wont to pass. Inquiries, counter inquiries, luncheon, a general inspection of the house and grounds, an exchange of maternal observations and experiences, dinner,—such was the programme of the day. In the evening, after dinner, while they were having their coffee, somebody asked Lucille to play. She was so passionately fond of music that she had, some little time after first coming down to live here, ordered a magnificent pianoforte from London, and had devoted a certain portion of every evening to playing *morceaux* from the greatest masters, ancient and modern. This evening, somehow, she felt happy; a

buoyancy of spirit for which she could scarcely account seemed to lift her far away from the griefs and cares of the world, of the heart; and as she played, her very soul seemed to float away on the current of the rushing notes.

The days were at their longest, and even at nine or ten o'clock, the twilight had fallen like a thin veil of black gauze over the sky; as if Day had thrown a vapoury cloud about herself, rather than that Night had displaced her. The moon, full and resplendent, had arisen, and flooded the landscape with a glow scarcely inferior to sunlight. The windows leading on the terrace had been left open, for the night was sultry, and the scene was so rarely beautiful that it would have jarred upon the feelings of every one, had artificial lights been introduced. Lucille's fingers were lingering over the last rippling notes of one of Beethoven's symphonies, when, on looking round for the first time since she had sat down at the piano, she found that Ettie had approached, and taken a chair a little behind her, and that the gentlemen, with Barbara, had walked out on the terrace, whence their

voices came in a subdued murmur, mingling with the soft singing of a neighbouring nightingale. The day and the sun are mortal foes to confidence; but who ever resisted the influence of summer twilight? Lucille, occasionally evoking chords and fantastic passages with her right hand, as she leant partly back, was presently talking to Ettie on the subject now nearest her heart, of her hopes and fears: hopes—fears—illusory as the vaporous clouds floating across the purply sky.

“Ah!” cried Ettie, suddenly. “I am sorry to say that I did not read the long account of the doings of the Central African Expedition in the *Times* this morning. I had it in the train, but had no opportunity of looking at it, as I was so much preoccupied with the children. I don’t choose to trust them to the care of anybody but myself in travelling. What did they say?”

“In this morning’s paper?” cried Lucille, starting up. “I have not looked at the *Times*. A long account?”

“About a column and a half. I wish I had read it. I thought of poor Sackville when

I observed it; but I threw down the paper, and then forgot all about it, until this moment."

Lucille ran across the room, and rang the bell. She was hardly able to curb her impatience until the servant answered the summons.

"The *Times* of this morning—where is it?" she cried.

"I think, my lady, it is in the library."

"Bring it here—no, light the lamps in the library, and find the paper. Will you come down to the library with me?" she asked, turning eagerly to Ettie as the servant retired. She advanced a few steps, then stood for a minute or two by the door, trembling. Lady Carluthen took her arm, and opened the door.

"Come, don't be foolish. I dare say if I could see your face, I should discover that you are quite pale. I suppose you have some silly presentiment?"

"No. I have no presentiment. I do not know why I am so foolish. I will go down, for——"

Lady Carluthen caught up her lace burnous

from a seat where she had thrown it on coming up from dinner, and they left the drawing-room, closing the door as they went out. The servant who had received Lucille's order was in the library. He had lighted the lamps, and placed all the papers of the morning and evening upon the centre table—all those, that is to say, which were usually read by the baroness. There was no further order for him, so he went away. Lucille took up the *Times*, and tried to read; but Ettie offered to read for her, if she liked.

"It is horribly long," said Ettie, with a little sigh of lamentation, regarding the "column and a half" of close print with a small grimace, as she sat down, and moved the reading-lamp some inches nearer to the edge of the table. "I shall not read it all—you chiefly wish to know—— They begin by commenting on the fact that a long time has elapsed since anything has been heard of the Expedition, and admit that they had begun to entertain grave fears regarding the safety of the persons composing it——"

"I was not wrong, then, in foreboding," said Lucille, interrupting her.

"No. And then, they go on to give a prosy—at least, it seems to be rather an interesting account, a kind of description of the places, and the people—curious plants and extraordinary animals, with many-syllabled names, and all the dangers, and so on—one of the poor creatures severely wounded in an encounter with a lion—Dr. Methridge—Ah——" she shuddered. "Then, here is Sackville Vayning's name——" Suddenly she uttered a little cry, and read on, but to herself.

"Why do you not read to me?—tell me—let me know—is he well?—for heaven's sake, Ettie, tell me——"

Ettie would not even look up, but continued to read, turning her face away from the light, so that Lucille could not see its expression. But her silence was as significant as any speech could be.

"Give me the paper, if you will not tell me," cried Lucille, rising, and extending her hand. Ettie pushed back her chair, and put the paper down by her side, to hinder Lucille from taking it.

"My poor Lucille," she said,

"Give me the paper, I beg and pray you."

"No, no. Do not ask to see it. It will be too terrible. I wish—I wish I had read it before I spoke to you about it, as I might have prepared you."

"Give it to me." Lucille suddenly caught the paper from Ettie's hand, and tried to read. For a minute or two, her fingers shook so much that the columns of type merged into a black tint before her eyes. Then, steadying the rattling paper, she read aloud, in a clear, unfaltering voice—

"We have to deplore, however, the loss of one of the gentlemen engaged in the expedition—Major Vayning. The details of his death are of a peculiarly painful nature. The weather had been unusually hot, and the party could travel only in the mornings and evenings, for the scorching sun and heavy sand would have completely prostrated the oxen. All around the Mokoscrotli the country is perfectly flat, and composed of soft white sand; trees and bushes are to be found at rare intervals, and the grass becomes so dry beneath the influence of a glaring sun blazing from a cloudless sky, that it crumbles

to powder in the hands. Travelling for days almost without water (the supply having become exhausted) the men and the cattle suffered fearfully from thirst. For four days the party was almost literally without water. Several of the cattle were bitten by the tsetse, and died. Major Vayning and one or two others made a short expedition in search of water, and during their absence from the rest of the party, the limited quantity of water which they took with them became utterly exhausted. Major Vayning was unhappily deceived by a mirage, and rashly walked about a quarter of a mile away from those accompanying him—Dr. M'Arthur, the younger Mr. Nash, and the guide. At the place where Major Vayning quitted his party, one clump of trees and bushes, with open spaces intervening, resembles so precisely another, that on leaving any given point, it is difficult to return. Already acutely suffering from the want of water, the unfortunate gentleman wandered to and fro for perhaps forty-eight hours; after that, he lay down—to die. The members of the party did not miss him immediately; but on discovering his absence,

they considered that their wisest—indeed, their only course would be to at once return to the temporary head-quarters of the Expedition, feeling it useless to attempt a search under the circumstances, their number being so limited that they feared to separate, and certain death awaited them if they lost the chief party. On returning, they found that wells had been discovered. A strong band was immediately organized, and a stringent search commenced. At the end of two days they came upon the body of Major Vayning. He was lying under a clump of trees, as if sleeping, his face turned downwards, resting upon his arms. This noble and gallant gentleman has been committed to earth beneath the clump of trees where he lay down to die ; his last resting place is marked by a rudely carved wooden cross. In consequence of this most lamentable death, one of the members of the expedition—Captain Marsh—has made arrangements to return to England, being charged, it is said, with letters and messages for different friends of the ill-fated gentleman, Major Vayning.”

Lucille read this long paragraph with a

voice which altered not in its slightest intonation from first to last, but her face conveyed the impression that she did not fully realize what she was reading. She had risen to take the newspaper from Ettie's hand, and had not resumed her seat, reading as she stood by the table, holding the paper so firmly that she crushed it as her fingers compressed each margin. Without relaxing her grip, or changing her attitude beyond slightly elevating her head, she looked at Lady Carluthen. All vestige of colour had fled from her face, even her lips were ashy white, her eyes were distended.

"It is not true," she said. "It is not true. It cannot be true."

Ettie looked at her in amazement.

"It must be true, I fear. They could not, *could* not make such a frightful mistake. What could possibly originate such a mistake, if it were one? It must be true. My dearest Lucille," she added, rising, and moving nearer to her, to put her arms about the slender figure of her friend, "I do not insist upon the truth of that paragraph from cruelty to you, but from kindness. It would be fatal mad-

ness to doubt it. I know," she quickly said, then, "that you have reason to mistrust any but the most absolute evidence on a matter touching you so closely, since—— There is not a possibility of doubting here."

"If this is true, then what have I to live for?" asked Lucille, throwing down the paper, and clasping her hands.

"For your child."

Lucille fell back into her chair, and leaning her face upon her hands on the table, began to weep bitterly. Ettie stood by her, without uttering a word, or doing anything to hinder her tears, until at length she lifted up her head.

"Yes, you are right. I used to be your teacher, Ettie; now you are mine. What can I do to-night? I cannot rejoin them—I could not—I have a racking headache."

"Do not make any excuses. I will tell them that you are unwell, and you can go to your own room. It is now late—nearly ten o'clock; and I am fatigued—I have had a long journey, and an exciting day."

"Thanks, thanks, thanks. If you will forgive me, I——"

"Forgive! What a word. Let me go with you to your room, and I will return to the drawing-room afterwards."

Lucille was trembling so much that when she rose she found a certain difficulty in walking; but she gained her own apartment. The next morning she appeared, very pale, but perfectly composed, and did not allude to the death of Major Vayning even once, not even when with Ettie, who, on her side, seeing that Lucille desired to avoid it, kept silence on the subject. A few days afterwards, Lucille mentioned the fact to Barbara, and then to Mr. Wynstyn, without making any comment.

Ettie, observing how little equal Lucille was to entertaining visitors, wished to leave her, but Lucille would not hear of this; on the contrary, she earnestly besought Ettie to stay with her for the present, and Ettie agreed. Ettie herself chiefly required rest just now, and had been obliged to fly from the turmoil of the London season; as it was, she could not remain more than three or four weeks at Holme Priory, and her husband left in four or five days, to return to his parliamentary duties. Mr. Wynstyn and

Barbara were perfectly preoccupied, so Lucille escaped any particular scrutiny. She devoted herself with feverish energy to every one about her, to her child specially, and to every call from without. She scarcely slept, she moved restlessly from place to place.

"You will kill yourself," said Lady Carluthen.

"No," she answered, with a sad smile. "Do not fear for me. The will of God be done—but it is very hard to submit. Pray for me, my friend; and stay with me as long as you can—will you not? I don't know what I shall do when you are gone. I feel that I am selfish—I have no sympathy for others."

Poor Lucille—poor crushed heart!

Two days before Lord Carluthen came back to rejoin his wife and children before their departure, Lucille and Ettie were walking slowly up and down the terrace in the cool shade, Mr. Wynstyn having taken Barbara and the three children for a row on the lake, which was situate a couple of miles from the Priory. A servant came to inform his mistress that a gentleman wished to see her on important business.

Lucille took the card which her visitor had given to the servant, and looked at it. She grew perfectly pale, and was obliged to support herself by leaning against the bulustrade. She extended the card to Ettie.

"Captain Marsh!" cried Ettie. She remembered the name, as that of the friend of Major Vayning who had quitted the Expedition for the purpose of fulfilling certain wishes of that ill-fated gentleman. "Tell Captain Marsh that your mistress will be with him presently," she added, to the servant, who went away.

"Will you come with me?" asked Lucille, in a low tone.

"If you wish it."

Captain Marsh had a delicate and trying task to perform, but he accomplished it with wonderful tact and kindness. He was a man remarkable in appearance, of perhaps eight and thirty years of age, his beard and hair prematurely dashed with gray, his face lined by suffering, and by a habit of profound reflection. He had come to deliver to the Baroness Deveril some letters, journals, and

a packet of little articles of jewellery entrusted to him by Major Vayning for her. It had been at his instigation chiefly that Major Vayning had joined the Expedition, although he did not know of the reasons which had induced his unfortunate friend to yield to his suggestions. He made not the slightest attempt to surprise any confidence on the part of Lady Deveril, simply delivering up the papers and the packet as a redemption of a last promise given to the dead. Before leaving England—he informed Lady Deveril—he and his poor friend had exchanged a promise that if either died ere the Expedition returned, the survivor should execute certain commissions, and abandon the party at every cost, each having the most paramount motive for exacting and for giving such promise. Captain Marsh could not help seeing the emotion which affected the Baroness as she took from his hands the small square parcel. He declined her mechanical invitation to partake of luncheon, and hastily swallowing some wine, went away as soon as he possibly could.

All was now over—all but the Epilogue, consisting of the silent suffering of the poor bruised heart which had done with hopes and fears for herself. Henceforth she must forget herself in the hopes and fears of others.

THE END.

